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LESSONS IN  
VERSE-CRAFT

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# LESSONS IN VERSE - CRAFT

BY S. GERTRUDE FORD

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TO  
CICELY

MY SISTER

THE LOYAL COMRADE, COMPANION,  
AND HELPER OF ALL MY LIFE,  
WITHOUT WHOSE PRICELESS LOVE, SYMPATHY,  
AND ENCOURAGEMENT NO BOOK OF MINE  
COULD EVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN,  
I OFFER THIS ONE  
WITH LOVE AND HOMAGE

*May 1919.*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

MANY of the examples of various verse-forms given in this book are from the author's own pen. Some of these have appeared in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, the *Daily News*, the *Poetry Review*, and *Poetry*. To the editors of these publications I am indebted for their courtesy in permitting reproduction.

I have also to acknowledge, with cordial thanks, the kindness of Mrs Meynell and Messrs Burns & Oates in granting permission to quote *The Shepherdess*; of the same publishers for the use of the lines quoted from Francis Thompson; of Mr John Lane and Sir William Watson, for four quotations from the works of the latter; of Messrs Macmillan, for the extracts from Christina Rossetti's *Collected Works*; of Mr Austin Dobson and Messrs Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., for three quotations from Mr Dobson's *Collected Poems*; of Miss May Morris, for right to reprint extracts from *The Earthly Paradise* and *Two Red Roses across the Moon*; of the Laureate and Mr John Murray, for the triolet *When First We Met*; of Messrs Heinemann, for the

quotation from *Atalanta in Calydon* ; of Messrs G. Bell & Sons, for two quotations from Coventry Patmore ; of Messrs John Richmond and Canon Langbridge, for the lines quoted from the latter's *Obscure Poet* experiment ; and of the Religious Tract Society, for a quotation from the same author's *Restful Thoughts for Dusty Ways*.

Two or three quotations I have failed to trace, and to the authors of these can only offer my apologies, with my thanks. I have also to thank the Proprietors and Editor of the *Lady's Companion* for permitting the reproduction of certain "Lessons in Verse-Craft" which have appeared in its columns.

S. G. F.

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## INTRODUCTORY

NEVER since Elizabeth's day, it seems safe to say, was the love of poetry or the desire to feel at home with the poets more widely diffused than in our own. This is especially true of the younger generation, as many competent observers bear witness. The world-war, with the torrent of new experiences and emotions let loose by it, may partly account for this unusual development of the poetic faculty ; but in pre-war days there was certainly a marked tendency in the same direction. Secondary education, cheap reprints of the standard works of poetry, and home-reading organisations all united to give impetus to the movement ; and to-day it is evident that, while many of the older men and women are still frankly bored by anything in the shape of verse, the young are increasingly interested in it. In one sense, no doubt, it is true that youth and poetry were always akin ; but the kinship was never closer than now.

With this new interest in the poets an eager curiosity concerning the raw materials of poetic art has been born in many minds ; curiosity as to the structure, the composition, of the various forms expressing it. There is a widespread wish to investigate personally those mysteries of root and stem, calyx and corolla, which in their union make

up the flower of language. To gratify that wish these *Lessons in Verse-Craft* have been prepared ; as an analysis, in terms intelligible to all, of certain forms and laws inseparably connected with poetry and the due, intelligent appreciation of the poets.

It is admitted that all art rests on a basis of science ; also that, let that science be mastered as it may, the artistic superstructure remains a sort of Merlin's palace, built after a fashion incommunicable by any known laws of architecture. *Poeta nascitur, non fit* remains a word of wisdom : your Lily of Parnassus will never become a dandelion, let professors of literature seek to propagate it as they may. The great, the outstanding and over-mastering poets will always be among their fellow-beings (to change the figure) as the golden eagle among tits and wrens ; though perhaps Lowell rather overshot the mark in likening them to

Those far stars which come in sight  
Once in a century.

But the rarity of poetry, in its perfection, will hardly deter its lovers from seeking to understand its laws, and, as far as they may, to put them in practice. And this is well. The world would miss much solace, much beauty even, without Holmes's "sweet albino-poets" of the second rank ; below the level of the imperial, full-coloured blondes to whom he compares those of the first, it is true, but fair in their own degree. Verse that is at once sincere and graceful—verse, that is to say, which is both deeply felt and written with the charm of accomplishment, though without the fiery power of genius—has its place and its use. So has light verse, as we shall see. To insist that all our poets should be Shakespeares and Miltons, or at least Wordsworths and Shelleys, would be like

rejecting all flowers but Sappho's queen-rose and the Madonna's lily.

To follow the paths of verse by aid of the clue of verse-craft is, then, no unprofitable study. By that clue we may find, if we may not follow, the way the masters went ; and the road and the race are in themselves no worthless reward, even to those who realise most clearly the inaccessible height of the goal. An inquiry into the structure of various verse-forms, moreover, has for the lover of poetry the charm of initiation into some divine freemasonry : it is a passport to the presence of the elect. Nor, to the elect themselves, at their beginnings, is such an inquiry without its profit. Poets, like musicians, may sing by ear, by instinct. But they will be well advised to learn their notes.





# LESSONS IN VERSE- CRAFT

## I

### HOW TO ENJOY POETRY—THE BE- GINNER'S BLUNDERS—POEMS FOR STUDENTS

A CELEBRATED modern journalist once said that he had known the mere mention of the word "poetry" scatter a crowd! Listeners previously eager, alert, and attentive took flight instantly, he declared, before the threat of a quotation from the poets. And in spite of the new interest in poetry in many circles it is a fact, though a most deplorable one, that the average man or woman may be seen furtively edging away, or stifling surreptitious yawns, when such a quotation intrudes into the conversation or oratory found interesting enough before. The brilliant writer above mentioned thinks this is because poetry (the real stuff, not its lifeless counterfeit, which is about as good a copy of its living self as a rosette is of a rose) is difficult to read. Poetry, it is commonly supposed, demands hard work of the intellectual sort on the reader's part; work demanding his most serious and strenuous attention.

Now, this is true of some poetic masterpieces ; but, emphatically, not of all. The study of poetry may be, and should be, a fund of pure artistic enjoyment ; obtained with less mental exertion, with more delightful ease, than any other form of art study. Music, painting, sculpture, architecture all demand more drudgery, from even the amateur who would gain an intelligent comprehension of their structure, than poetry does from her neophytes. And the rewards are great ; for the poets are incomparably delightful companions, instructors, consolers. I speak as one who knows : personally, I never had a wound but a poet helped to heal it ; never yet wandered in dark places without finding one of those spiritual torch-bearers to hold a light and show the way. So say men and women everywhere who have been admitted to their fellowship ; and the secret store enriching these may be shared by others who will take the trouble to learn the talisman, the "Open, sesame," which lays it bare.

The first thing to remember is that the way to enjoy this art, as every other, is to begin at the beginning. In other words, the way is a ladder ; to be climbed from the bottom upwards, one step at a time, not at a single flying leap or by a series of jerks and jumps. Don't try to run before you can walk, as mothers tell their toddlers : take the lowest rung first. "I did think of going in for poetry once, in my last year at school ; but it's so horribly hard and dry," complained Clarice Graham to a literary friend, who had pointed out that blank ignorance of the poets would certainly be an obstacle to a girl who hankered after a literary career. And she wondered why the friend burst out laughing (bad manners, no doubt, but excusable under the circumstances) when she found

out that the books Clarice had begun on were Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Cary's translation of Dante, and Browning's *The Ring and the Book*! Masterpieces all; but works, too, to tax the highest faculties of the most practised student. It was as if one who had never climbed an English mountain in his life should essay the Alps; as if (to use a homelier simile) a girl at a dressmaking class, without the slightest preliminary knowledge of drafting, fitting, or cutting out, should expect to turn out a Court costume after her first lesson!

No, Clarice's way to enjoy poetry is, emphatically, not the right one; nor is it even the way to find out what poetry is. Feed on "the milk of every muse" before venturing on the strong meats of Parnassus; leave Milton and Dante and Browning severely alone till you can read them as they deserve to be read: not as dry-as-dust professors, but as teachers who are joy-givers and light-bearers too. Meanwhile, try Tennyson in his narrative poems—"Dora," "The Brook," and "Enoch Arden" are perhaps the best to begin on. Try Wordsworth, at his shortest and simplest: the Wordsworth of the little Nature-vignettes like "The Primrose on the Rock," "The Skylark," and the nameless poem comparing the nightingale's song with the stock-dove's; of the wonderful "Lucy" lyrics, every one of them like "a big, round tear" crystallised, immortalised, where it fell. The most untutored student will find the tear, if not the crystal; the nature, if not the art. The poem's limpid, flawless clarity of form and style and manner may or may not, at this stage of his literary development, impress him: he will, in any case, hardly fail to respond to the tale it tells. He will see the picture of the young lover going blithely to seek his mountain maid, then

"strong and gay, and like a rose in June"; and feeling a sudden, sharp presentiment of her early death as the moon he has been watching drops down behind her house. Nor will any but the most insensible of readers miss the pathos, unforced and unsurpassed, in another poem of the same group: a life's story, a love's tragedy, in three simple verses:

She dwelt among the untrodden ways,  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A maid whom there were none to praise,  
And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone,  
Half hidden from the eye,  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be,  
But she is in her grave; and oh!  
The difference to me!

In nearly all the poets there are simple, clear-cut gems like this; poems which appeal to "the untutored heart" no less than to the trained and disciplined intellect. Wordsworth and Tennyson have more of them than their brother poets; but even Browning gave us one in "You'll Love Me Yet," in *Pippa Passes*, surely his most delightful drama as well as the simplest; to say nothing of the oft-cited "Evelyn Hope." Other masters of the art almost as abstruse as Browning, and fully as profound, sometimes sang as simply and in notes as clear. All poets have their tender human moods, in which the least practised of verse-students may feel at home with them. In these, then, let the novice seek them first; sure that the search will not fail of its reward.

## II

### WHAT POETRY IS — THE THREE ORDERS OF VERSIFICATION — HOW TO WRITE VERSE

BEFORE we can either understand or enjoy poetry we must know, first of all, what poetry is. You cannot study the structure of an art with any hope of success till you comprehend its nature ; a truism sometimes, like many another, forgotten or ignored. And the best way to determine what poetry is? It is, perhaps, to discover first of all what it is not.

Not a cluster of pretty words strung aimlessly together, as children string daisies, "to be a moment's ornament." Not a mere tinkle of tune and jingle of rhyme, with no shaping, informing impulse of thought and feeling divined in and through that outward body of sound. Yet thought and feeling alone are by no means enough to produce a poem. It is at least equally important to know how to express what is thought and felt in harmonious, congruous words, fitly placed and rightly divided ; words that sing themselves. For the poets are always said to sing, not to speak ; and in that "song"—that cadenced, balanced arrangement of words, as of notes in music—lies the great, the root difference between them and the masters of prose. A prose writer says what



he has to say ; a poet sings it. So we get to Carlyle's definition of poetry as " musical thought " ; one true as terse. Thought which sings itself ; ideas and emotions which dance, or march, or glide in rhythm ; feeling which moves in tune and time as naturally as the heart beats, with a rhythm as instinctive and inevitable,—these things are poetry. It is the thing which could not be said in prose ; which imperatively insists on expression through its own medium as the only one possible to it ; which lives by its own law and justifies itself by its own inherent and triumphant beauty.

Here is another definition by one of the greatest of twentieth-century poets, Sir William Watson ; one which, moreover, is itself a masterpiece of poetic art :

Forget not, brother singer ! that though Prose  
Can never be too truthful or too wise,  
Song is not Truth, not Wisdom ; but the rose  
Upon Truth's lips, the light in Wisdom's eyes.

She is, that is to say, the beauty of the truth. Verse you may have without beauty ; never poetry.

And this brings us to the difference between verse and poetry—the three orders of versification being poetry, verse, and doggerel. Here is an example of each : the first a stanza from Shelley's " Adonais," where thought, feeling, and music (poetry's trinity in unity) are so interfused that we cannot imagine them apart :

Another Splendour on his mouth alit,  
That mouth whence it was wont to draw the breath  
Which gave it strength to pierce the guarded wit  
And pass into the panting heart beneath

With lightning and with music : the damp death  
 Quenched its caress upon his icy lips,  
 And, as a dying meteor stains a wreath  
 Of moonlight vapour, which the cold night clips,  
 It flushed through his pale limbs, and passed to its  
 eclipse.

That is poetry. And this is verse: thought correctly and gracefully expressed in rhyme and metre, but without the wing-beat, the song-rush, of the power which is "half angel and half bird." Tom Moore wrote it, in one of his least characteristic moods :

The friends who in our sunshine live,  
 When winter comes, are flown,  
 And he who has but tears to give  
 Must weep those tears alone.  
 But Thou wilt heal that broken heart  
 Which, like the plants that throw  
 Their fragrance from the wounded part,  
 Breathes sweetness out of woe.

True, helpful, consolatory—but commonplace withal. And this, though a great poet wrote it, is doggerel ; in which the side-glance at the "loud waterfall" is hardly enough to convey the Nature-worship of Wordsworth :

"Oh! Johnny, never mind the doctor ;  
 You've done your best, and that is all."  
 She took the reins, when this was said,  
 And gently turned the pony's head  
 From the loud waterfall.

I have said that there is room in the world for verse ; and there is, fortunately for versifiers. In every art talent, as well as genius, has its appointed work and worth ; as Nature has room for her low-growing hawthorns and hollies no less than for

her forest oaks and cedars of Lebanon. But there is no room at all for doggerel, which may be defined as bald prose arranged in rhymes. What it attempts to say would have been far better said in the plain speech of the street and the home ; allowing, indeed, that there was any need to say it at all.

And the way to write verse (granting, as we did at the outset, that only the elect can hope to write poetry) is to study the various verse-forms till experiment in them becomes easy. Verse is nearest poetry when it is most natural, most spontaneous, and is, moreover, the work of a trained hand and ear. Victor Hugo was once asked by a would-be poet, "Is not poetry an extremely difficult art?" He replied, very gently, "No ; either very easy or impossible." Those to whom verse is a brain-racking effort should never attempt it. It comes to those for whom it is meant, after due study of the best models. To saturate the mind with poetry—to analyse, then, its forms till thought flows into them with ease,—this is the way to write verse not unworthy of a scholar in the poets' school. The first of these forms which we shall study is the sonnet.

### III

#### THE SONNET—THE THREE STANDARD FORMS—EXAMPLES

"A SONNET is a moment's monument," says Rossetti in the prelude-sonnet of his own great series, "The House of Life." And this is precisely what it is, or should be: "a miniature of loveliness," commemorating and embalming a momentary impression; fixing it, in lines few but sufficient; fusing its various tones and tints into a lyrical unity. In this form the poet carves a cameo, not a statue, and he must remember this in the carving. The result should be a thing clear, concise, intense, made so by that natural force of feeling or thought which clarifies itself in the utterance. Lyrical emotion burns itself to a crystal; its simplicity is its strength. And all short verse-forms (with the possible exception of the old French ones, which are peculiarly adapted for the dainty verbal toys of "light verse") should have the lyric impulse behind them. All their scattered rays of fancy or feeling, moreover, should be focussed at last into one clear point of light—the end crowning the whole. The sonnet form rebels more than almost any other against the "lame and impotent conclusion" so often forced upon it, even by writers who should know better.

The sonnet has three standard forms: the Shakespearean, the Spenserian, and the Miltonic,

sometimes called the Petrarchan, from Petrarch's use of it in the thousand sonnets to Laura. From this circumstance of its Italian origin it is also known as the "Italianate" form; the Shakespearean, similarly, being called the "English" sonnet. Spenser's sonnet-structure is a modification—a very beautiful and effective one—of the Italian model. A fourth form, the Meredithian, is so called from George Meredith's use of it in the "Modern Love" sequence. It modifies the English (or Shakespearean) type by substituting a quatrain for the final couplet, being the only recognised sonnet-stanza consisting of more than the regulation number of lines (fourteen). This sixteen-line sonnet is still regarded as a rather daring innovation in English verse, and is advisable only for skilled artists, in whom metrical audacities are more readily pardoned than in the tyro.

In the Miltonic or Italianate form the rhymes are arranged thus:—A, b, b, a; a, b, b, a; c, d, e; c, d, e. A frequent variant of the sestet rhymes (the sestet being, of course, the last six lines, as the first eight form the octave) is, I think, a more effective arrangement. It groups them in this order:—C d; c d; c d. Other variants are permissible; Rossetti uses several.

The Shakespearean form consists, invariably, of three quatrains and a concluding couplet; the rhymes running thus:—A, b, a, b; c, d, c, d; e, f, e, f; g, g. The Spenserian differs from both; here is its rhyme-scheme:—A, b, a, b; b, c, b, c; c, d, c, d; e, e. Thus each quatrain after the first catches up and echoes the end-rhyme of its predecessor; the sestet proceeding on Shakespeare's model from this "echo rhyme" in the ninth line to the close.

Perhaps the actual rhymes will make the various schemes clearer to the elementary student. This,



then, is Milton's arrangement, in the sonnet on his blindness, one of the most majestic ever written:—Spent, wide, hide, bent; sent, chide, denied, prevent; need, best, state; speed, rest, wait. In another Miltonic model the sestet rhymes are grouped thus, according to the alternative arrangement above noted:—Bower, spare; tower, air; power, bare. And here are the rhymes of one of Shakespeare's loveliest examples, No. 73:—Behold, hang, cold, sang; day, west, away, rest; fire, lie, expire, by; strong, long. A good Spenserian model contains the following:—It, see, wit, me; be, hue, free, ensue; you, seed, true, proceed; made, fade.

It will be seen that Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton are the three great exemplars of sonnet-structure. Students are particularly recommended to study Milton's above mentioned, with the great sonnet on the Piedmontese martyrs; Shakespeare's 73rd, 74th, and 146th (three of his noblest); and the three in Spenser's "Amoretti" beginning "Since I did leave the presence of my love," "Men call you fair, and you do credit it," and "One day I wrote her name upon the strand." There are many other noble models, the best being Mrs Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese"; Christina Rossetti's "Monna Innominata"; D. G. Rossetti's "House of Life"; and Wordsworth's "Sonnets of Liberty and Independence"; though the last-named poet often takes such liberties as only a master may, producing in the result a curious, though effective, hybrid between the Miltonic and Shakespearean forms. Nevertheless, the example beginning "Scorn not the sonnet" shows with inimitable power and charm what immortal cup-bearers have poured their wine into this narrow vessel; and another ("Nuns fret

not at their convent's narrow room") is a little masterpiece triumphantly vindicating the limitations of the form. The late Eugène Lee-Hamilton's "Sonnet on the Sonnet," in the "Wingless Hours" series, also sets forth what the masters have done with it in noble and memorable fashion.

Students often ask which models of a certain kind or form of verse they should study when they have only time thoroughly to examine and get by heart "just a few." The sonnets above cited will serve their purpose admirably; and no lover of poetry can afford to neglect the superb examples furnished by Sir William Watson in *The Purple East* (since reprinted in *The Year of Shame*), *For England*, and elsewhere; and by Mrs Meynell in *Renouncement*, *The Daisy*, and many others.

But it often happens that a rhyme-scheme or metrical rule is more easily learnt from a gay than a grave model. Here is a witty American example of the Italianate form:

In writing sonnets, frame them on this plan:

You get the first line and the second—so,

And rhyme the latter with the one below;

Then rhyme the first—provided that you can.

Now work in some allusion to a man.

Avoid the line that limps and halts. You know

It ain't a sonnet if it limps. Go slow.

See that the metre's right. The lines must scan.

In the sestet you have some latitude:

You find an easy word to rhyme—say grove.

Now find a rhyme for "latitude." Try "shrewd."

This line must rhyme with "love," or "dove," or  
"strove,"

The next with some such word as "brood" or "food"

—And there's your sonnet. Throw it in the stove.

If you don't the editor will ! For the sonnet thus laboriously concocted would remain a concoction merely. Sonnets must be made "according to recipe," it is true ; but inspiration is the chief, the first ingredient.

Here is the genuine article ; Wordsworth's imperishable sonnet to the unfortunate painter, Haydon :

High is our calling, friend ! Creative art,  
Whether the instrument of words she use,  
Or pencil pregnant with ethereal hues,  
Demands the service of a mind and heart,  
Though sensitive, yet in their weakest part  
Heroically fashioned, to infuse  
Faith in the whispers of the lonely muse,  
When the whole world seems adverse to desert.  
And oh, when nature sinks, as oft she may,  
Through long-lived pressure of obscure distress,  
Still to be strenuous for the bright reward,  
And in the soul admit of no decay,  
Brook no continuance of weak-mindedness—  
Great is the glory ! for the strife is hard.

With this masterpiece—one of poetry's immortal things in sonnet-stanza—we may fitly close our lesson on the sonnet.

## IV

### THE LYRIC

THE lyric poet, more than any other, needs to keep in mind Milton's celebrated triad of poetic attributes. His poetry, in particular, must be "simple, sensuous, passionate." Simple, that its appeal may be universal and direct ; sensuous—that is, full of that colour and music which appeal to what may be called the *memory* of the senses, to that inner, spiritual sense which registers within impressions received from without ; passionate, because life is so, and the lyric must before all things be alive. It should be short, for passion condenses itself in its utterance to a marvellous *multum in parvo* ; it should, except in confessedly "light verse," deal with one or other of the great elemental realities—Love, Life, Death, Nature, and "the general heart" in its sorrow or joy ; it should be absolutely at unity with itself in aim and theme, introducing no alien motive to clash with the fundamental note ; finally and indispensably, it should clothe its meaning in music, for only the melody inherent in words well chosen, congruous, fit, can make the written word immortal and give it a permanent place among the treasures of memory. As examples of the perfect modern lyric (selected, of course, from many others equally noteworthy), students should read the "Lucy" lyrics of Wordsworth, already referred to in an earlier chapter ; "Ye Banks and Braes" (Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" version, far superior

to the alternative one in double long-metre); Browning's "You'll Love Me Yet," in "Pippa Passes"; Tennyson's "Come Not When I am Dead," with the songs in the "Idylls" and the "Princess"; Matthew Arnold's "Marguerite" (the section beginning "Yes! in the sea of life enisled"); Christina Rossetti's "Good Friday," a particularly noble specimen of the devotional lyric; Jean Ingelow's "Alone";<sup>1</sup> Sir William Watson's "Glimpse" and "Leave-Taking," and Mrs Meynell's "Shepherdess" (called "The Lady of My Delight" in some anthologies, though the author prefers her own title). I quote the latter, as one of the purest types of lyrical perfection in contemporary poetry; as lyrical work in a new field, also, for it appeared in the "Later Poems" of 1904, in the sunrise-time of that wonderful new love of woman for woman which seemed to come in with the new century. And it seems safe to say that the charm and the soul of womanhood were never so sung by woman. The poem has worked its way into the language, but can never be quoted too often:

She walks—the lady of my delight—

A shepherdess of sheep.

Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white,

She guards them from the steep.

She feeds them on the fragrant height,

And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,

Dark valleys safe and deep.

Into that tender breast at night

The chastest stars may peep.

She walks—the lady of my delight—

A shepherdess of sheep.

---

<sup>1</sup> From "Afternoon at a Parsonage."

She keeps her little thoughts in sight,  
 Though gay they run and leap;  
 She is so circumspect and right,  
 She has her soul to keep.  
 She walks—the lady of my delight—  
 A shepherdess of sheep.

One more quotation may suffice; and for this I select a man's love-lyric—one of Shelley's; but, being Shelley's, one quite as far removed from the conventional love-poem, and of a sentiment as rarefied and ethereal. It breathes the same Alpine air as Mrs Meynell's lyric; the same "winds austere and pure" blow through it and give it atmosphere, give it the breath of life. Here it is—that wonderful nameless poem which is the very voice of love's aspiration ennobling its despair; the feeling of Schubert's Serenade put into another art-medium, with its sigh and its soul unlost in the process:

One word is too often profaned  
 For me to profane it,  
 One feeling too falsely disdained  
 For thee to disdain it.  
 One hope is too like despair  
 For prudence to smother,  
 And pity from thee more dear  
 Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love,  
 But wilt thou accept not  
 The worship the heart lifts above,  
 And the heavens reject not;  
 The desire of the moth for the star,  
 Of the night for the morrow;  
 The devotion to something afar  
 From the sphere of our sorrow?

The ideal Nature-lyric, in specimens of which English poetry particularly abounds, shares the intensity, the simplicity and clarity, of this. So with lyrics of life and death and the life beyond death; so, indeed, with every lyric worth the name. Each keeps itself in harmony and unity with itself by the singleness, the solitariness, of its own proper emotion; rejecting superfluities, irrelevancies, embroideries, save as they serve to illustrate its main theme and thesis, as in the four lovely simile-stanzas of the "Skylark" ode (*the* "Skylark" ode being Shelley's; not Wordsworth's, nor another's). It burns up, by the white heat of the passion generating it, all extraneous matter of thought or imagery; and stands forth at last cleansed, clarified, "even as by fire," and through that fire made perfect.

This is, of course, the ideal. To approach it as nearly as natural limitations permit is the task of every writer who, out of the depths of a sincere lyrical emotion, would evolve a lyric.



## V

### THE RONDEL — ITS LIMITATIONS— ITS STRUCTURE — RONDEL AND PSEUDO-RONDEL

THE old French verse-forms, of which the best known are the ballade, the rondeau, the rondel, with its first-cousin the villanelle, and the pantoum, are now so thoroughly acclimatised in English poetry that no student of its modern developments can afford to ignore them. These metres, originally condemned by many poets and critics who took themselves seriously, not to say solemnly, have survived that condemnation by their own inherent vitality : their birthright of original grace. They have much to commend them when wrought out artistically and with due regard to their limitations. A cameo is not expected to fill the niche of a Colossus (to vary Dr Johnson's famous metaphor), nor a *soufflé* to be as nutritious as a soup. As the late W. E. Henley, an accomplished master of these forms, said of one of them, the villanelle, we "must not ask of it the swell of organs, grandiose and sublime." The old French verse-forms in all their varieties rather resemble a zither, a guitar, or a peal of "fairly bells"; exquisitely musical when rightly rung or handled, but capable of light, slight music only.

Yet the rondel (not to be confused with the rondel, of which Austin Dobson's "Love comes

back to his ancient dwelling" is a good example) became an instrument able to give out snatches of organ-music in the hands of that great religious artist, Christina Rossetti. These roundels show that brief flights may be high flights too; and this without suspicion of "high-flying" in its derogatory sense. There is no *appearance* of seeking the heights; there is effortless ease on the wing; and yet the heaven of heavens is entered. Simple as noble, fitted to the uses of heaven and the deepest moods of the soul in love with heavenly things, these are masterpieces even excelling Swinburne's in "A Century of Roundels"; equaling them in form, excelling them in essence, in spirituality. Few have ever poured the very wine of life into so slender a chalice without spilling the draught or spoiling it. The old French metres are commonly used for echoing the gayest of Love's laughter, not for crystallising his, or Urania's, tears; their part is not to mourn with Melpomene but to dance with Terpsichore. But Christina Rossetti fused the form she chose among them with the loftiest love and religion, as well as with the most accomplished art, in "Balm in Gilead"; a pure example:

Heartsease I found, where Love-lies-bleeding  
Empurpled all the ground:  
Whatever flowers I missed unheeding,  
Heartsease I found.

Yet still my garden mound  
Stood sore in need of watering, weeding,  
And binding growths unbound.

Ah! when shades fell to light succeeding,  
I hardly dared look round:  
"Love-lies-bleeding" was all my pleading,  
Heartsease I found.

And here is a pseudo-roundel—really a lyric leaning to the roundel form—from the same magic pen :

Looking back along life's trodden way,  
Gleams and greenness linger on the track.  
Distance melts and mellows all to-day,  
Looking back.

Rose and purple and a silvery grey,  
Is that cloud the cloud we called so black?  
Evening harmonises all to-day,  
Looking back.

Foolish feet so prone to halt or stray!  
Foolish heart so restive on the rack!  
Yesterday we sighed, but not to-day,  
Looking back.

It will be seen that this differs, in certain points, from the previous and strictly correct example. Eleven lines only are permissible in the true, the perfect roundel, including the refrain which is a feature common to all these forms. This refrain must, in the roundel, occur three times in all—at the beginning of the first line and in the fourth and eleventh, which must consist of the introductory phrase or sentence alone. Two rhymes only are allowed; arranged alternately, as in a common-metre stanza, in the opening and closing quatrains. The middle triplet begins and ends with a rhyme fitting the refrain, reserving the alternate rhyme for its second line.

Any experiment failing to conform to these fixed rules may be a charming poem, but not a roundel. The length of the line and the refrain, however, may be varied at pleasure; as will be

seen from yet another of Christina Rossetti's masterpieces in this form :

They throng from the east and the west,  
The north and the south, with a song ;  
To golden abodes of their rest  
They throng.

Eternity stretches out long ;  
Time, brief at its worst or its best,  
Will quit them of ruin and wrong.

A rainbow aloft for their crest,  
A palm for their weakness made strong,  
As doves breast all winds to their nest,  
They throng.

Students should also read carefully the wonderful roundels "We are of Those," "Yea, if Thou Wilt," "One Sorrow More," "Home by Different Ways," "Through Burden and Heat," and many others which they will find in the "Collected Works" of this virgin saint among the poets. These models will give a sufficient idea of the roundel's metre and structure—of its fixed rules and of those which may be altered at will—without need of further technicalities. "Looking Back" must not, of course, be taken as a model. Lovely as a poem, it would never pass muster as a roundel ; nor was it intended as one, being one of those pseudo-roundels—lyrics bearing a superficial resemblance to the form—of which Leigh Hunt's "Jenny Kissed Me" is one of the best-known and most charming specimens.

Writing in another of the old French forms, the triolet (which we shall next consider), Austin Dobson calls his graceful experiments in it "Rose-Leaves." And that pretty title expresses precisely

what roundels also, when used for the purposes of light verse, should be. Instruments fit for the fairies, their music should fall as softly and as gracefully as a shower of petals that leave sweetness where they fall.

They will haunt the memory, then, when epic harmonies are forgotten: pot-pourri in porcelain; a haunting fragrance embalmed in vessels exquisite as fragile. Poetry has room for them and their sister forms; as Nature has for her harebell and cowslip chimes, no less than for the wind in the pine-forest and the thunder among the hills.

## VI

### THE TRIOLET

THE briefest of all the old French verse-forms—at least of those in common use among modern poets—is the triolet. This, besides being limited to eight lines only, must repeat the first of these twice and the second once after its original appearance; thus leaving only three out of the eight to develop the theme. Two rhymes and two only are permitted. (In all these metres, it may be noted in passing, both the number of rhymes and of lines are fixed quantities, which may in no case be exceeded.)

The announcement of the theme, in the two opening lines, is followed by a third line rhyming with the first. This latter then recurs as the fourth, and the fifth rhymes with it—three assonances together. The sixth is rhymed with the second; and the double “repeat” or refrain—lines 1 and 2 reintroduced as 7 and 8—winds up the whole. It sounds complicated, but is simple enough in practice. And the result should be clear as a crystal, light as a *soufflé*; for to the perfect triolet clarity is as indispensable as brevity, and a light hand blends both. So made, the song-syllabub seems a mere bubble; airily light and “gracile.”

Is poetry possible within such narrow limits? We shall see.

Most students of poetic art would have said,

had not the contrary been proved, that the triolet as a medium for serious poetry was frankly impossible. Tragedy, in particular, they would have counted beyond its pale: the spreading growth of a cedar of Lebanon rebels against the limits of an ornamental flower-pot. But the genius of Dr Robert Bridges has achieved the apparently impossible: he has summed up a life's tragedy in a triolet, probably the finest ever written. We can see in it the whole length and breadth of a love-sorrow; the sweep of a Sahara in one golden grain of sand :

When first we met we did not guess  
 That Love would prove so hard a master.  
 Of more than common friendliness  
 When first we met we did not guess.  
 Who could foretell this sore distress,  
 This irretrievable disaster,  
 When first we met? We did not guess  
 That Love would prove so hard a master.

Mr Austin Dobson's well-named "Rose-Leaves," to which reference has already been made, have another and a very different charm. One more appropriate, too, let it be conceded: light comedy, when all is said and done, befits a triolet better than high tragedy. I give one specimen. The lines are shorter here, length of line and choice of metre being the only variable points in this form :

In the School of Coquettes  
 Madam Rose is a scholar.  
 O, they fish with all nets  
 In the School of Coquettes!  
 If her brooch she forgets  
 'Tis to show her new collar:  
 In the School of Coquettes  
 Madam Rose is a scholar.



And here is a delightful American example, light as a puff-ball or a feather, slight as a snow-flake ; a mere gossamer thread, but not without the gossamer's grace. It is supposed to be the utterance (or rather the private thought inwardly uttered) of a delightful *ingénue* with a taste for poetry and a tendency to hero-worship :

To kiss a fan—  
What a poky poet !  
The stupid man  
To kiss a fan !  
When he knows—that—he can—  
Or ought to know it . . .  
To kiss a FAN !  
What a poky poet !

It will be seen that the chief necessity in all these forms (next to that of keeping their fixed rules) is the variation of emphasis, of stress, in the refrain. To achieve this, of course, a variation of the essential meaning behind the phrase is necessary. Note how Dr Bridges secures this result in "When First We Met." A student could have no finer (though in one sense no more hopeless) model. In all the examples cited, indeed, there is the same skilful change, or growth, of meaning in the recurrent lines ; a device by which monotony is avoided in each of these verse-forms made "with a trick of ritournelle," like the old English "round" in music. Such monotony would, otherwise, be the ruin of them all, far more than their inherent slightness of structure ; for what is light and slight may be imperishable. A foam-flake, crystallised, may serve to bring the ocean before us ; as a master of miniature painting may represent a beautiful face no less beautifully than a fresco-painter. But verse that

is monotonous, tedious, tiresome has no poetic *raison d'être* ; and the old French forms—especially the triolet, the most severely limited of all metres save the three-line Japanese *hāikai*—would certainly suffer from this fatal blemish but for that saving grace of change with which the artist invests it. “The same thing goes and comes back ever,” it is true ; but the old theme takes a new meaning and music, the old phrase is seen in a new light, every time. This is the secret of writing a successful triolet.

## VII

### THE BALLADE

THE first thing to learn about a ballade is that it is not a ballad. The final "e" makes all the difference. A ballade is one of the most popular, and in skilled hands one of the most charming, of the early French forms we are at present considering. A ballad, on the other hand, is one of the earliest Scotch or English verse-forms. Many of the best ballads are written in Scots; and by "Anon,"<sup>1</sup> as a witty modern limerick bears witness. Sir Walter Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* has preserved a goodly number of these, full of the charm of folk-song, legend, and old romance.

Of the ballad we shall have more to say in a later chapter; but it is with the ballade that we are here concerned. "The easiest metre, because it is the most restricted," paradoxically remarks one of its finest exponents, Mr G. K. Chesterton. (Probably he does not regard the triolet as a "metre" at all! But what about the rondeau?) G. K. C., of course, thinks in paradoxes; and this one, like most of his verbal fireworks, has the light of truth in it as well as the flashlight of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch thinks they may all have been written, or more probably rewritten, by one hand. See his *Studies in Literature*.

fancy. The more strictly we are penned in, obviously, the less likely we are to wander ; and the muse often welcomes a sojourn in strait enclosures, as Wordsworth recognised when he wrote the charming sonnet on that form's " narrow plot of ground " referred to in a previous chapter. This is one good reason why blank verse, which tempts to expansion, should be avoided by students in their early experiments. Compression, usually, is what they need : the rigorous road which permits no swerving either to the right hand or the left. Such a road is marked out for them in the ballade.

This form has twenty-eight lines, including the " envoy " (which is one of its indispensable features), with only three rhymes among them. In no case may more than three be used. The first and third lines of each octave, or eight-line stanza, account for one of these rhymes ; the second, fourth, fifth, and seventh lines for another ; lines 6 and 8 for the third. The " envoy " is always a quatrain, repeating the rhyme-scheme of the four lines immediately preceding it. That is to say, it follows the order of the rhymes used in the last half of each stanza. Fourteen words, in all, must have the same rhyme-sound ; so the rhymer who is misguided enough to choose a word with few assonances will speedily find himself in difficulties. The refrain occurs four times, ending each verse and the " envoy." This after-word used to be always addressed to some " Prince " or " Princess," real or imaginary ; a rule by no means obligatory in modern examples.

Here is a ballade translated from a French legend :

## THE FOREST OF THE DEAD

Is it there, the blowing breeze  
Wailing where the rillets run,  
Sighing, crying through the trees,  
Full of trouble never done?  
Sounds a plaint, by star or sun,  
Like a wild song overhead :  
All the leaves weep, one by one,  
In the Forest of the Dead.

There a wind that knows no ease  
Flits by night, and ghosts that shun  
Sight of men, and memories ;  
Moan is there and malison,  
Spectral horn and ghostly gun,—  
Blown and fired again, 'tis said,  
There, where hands and lips are none,  
In the Forest of the Dead.

Phantoms that the graveyard frees  
Close there too, with shocks that stun ;  
Where the grove's voice is the sea's  
Close Sir Carl and Calimon.<sup>1</sup>  
Drear the woods lie, drab and dun,  
Round two rigid forms and red :  
Grim the fight they lost and won  
In the Forest of the Dead !

## ENVOY

Cut the thread ; the web is spun !  
Dim the ghostly light there shed ;  
Fixed, like light in Ajalon,<sup>2</sup>  
In the Forest of the Dead.

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<sup>1</sup> A knight and squire who fell together in a midnight duel.

<sup>2</sup> "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon ; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."—Joshua x. 12.

Identical rhyme-sounds like "sun" and "malison," "one" and "won," should, however, be avoided when possible. Here is an example which does manage to avoid them throughout:

### SIC TRANSIT

Summer and winter, through dark days and bright,  
 We watch the stars set and the sunrise flame :  
 The dawn, and then the noon, and then the night  
 Passes, like beauty turned to blight and blame.  
 Wan Age we see where Youth played out its game,  
 And where the birds sang and the leaves uncurled  
 Bare boughs and empty nests ; and we exclaim  
 "So passes, then, the glory of the world !"

No empire trembles now for Cæsar's might,  
 No Antony at Cleopatra's name.  
 Time can but deck the tombs of squire and knight,  
 Ruler and warrior, damosel and dame.  
 Hope fails like fear, their end one and the same ;  
 Passes youth's dream, a flower with May-dews pearled,  
 And then the dream of love, and then of fame ;  
 So passes, then, the glory of the world.

Alas ! for shattered strength and broken flight,  
 For the wild heart, at length grown tired and tame !  
 What have we at last of all for which we fight ?  
 Wounds and a grave ; honour made one with shame.  
 Where the wing sped the foot toils, halt and lame,  
 And Doubt, to the toiler's heart, his shaft hath hurled,  
 Whispering, "This the Sun no cloud could maim ?"  
 So passes, then, the glory of the world ?"

### ENVOY

Prince of the Night, what checks thy random aim ?  
 The Star in the East, the Morning's flag unfurled !  
 She passed and yet returned ; went, and yet came.  
 So passes, then, the glory of the world !

Mr Austin Dobson uses a double refrain in his delicious "Ballade of Prose and Rhyme." No better specimen of the ballade with a "repeat" line in the middle as well as at the end could be given. The single "last line" refrain is, however, more usual, and certainly safer and wiser for the student who desires to experiment in this form.

When the ways are heavy with mire and rut,  
In November fogs, in December snows,  
When the North wind howls, and the door is shut,  
There is place and enough for the pains of prose.  
But whenever a scent from the whitethorn blows,  
And the jasmine-stars at the casement climb,  
And a Rosalind-face at the lattice shows,—  
Then hey! for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

When the brain gets dry as an empty nut,  
When the reason stands on its squarest toes,  
When the mind (like a beard) has a "formal cut,"  
There is place and enough for the pains of prose.  
But whenever the May-blood stirs and glows,  
And the young year draws to the "golden prime,"  
And Sir Romeo sticks in his ear a rose,—  
Then hey! for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

In a theme where the thoughts have a pedant strut,  
In a changing quarrel of "Ayes" and "Noes,"  
In a starched procession of "If" and "But,"  
There is place and enough for the pains of prose.  
But whenever a soft glance softer grows,  
And the light hours dance to the trysting-time,  
And the secret is told "that no one knows,"—  
Then hey! for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

#### ENVOY

In the workaday world, for its needs and woes,  
There is place and enough for the pains of prose.  
But whenever the May-bells clash and chime,  
Then hey! for the ripple of laughing rhyme!



G. K. C.'s notable ballades should also be studied ; and Henley's "Ballade made in the Hot Weather," so justly praised for its "magnificent conjuring up of cool and liquid images," as an irregular example.

In all these specimens the student will note the variety of metre, and of length of line, permitted him, here as elsewhere in the "ritournelle" verse-forms. But it is necessary to repeat that in these points only are they variable ; fixed stars, otherwise, which must swerve not a hair's-breadth from their orbit.

## VIII

### THE RONDEAU—THE RONDEL—THE VILLANELLE—THE PANTOUM

RONDEAUX are, I think, only second to ballades in popularity with the poets who still experiment in these restricted forms ; grown more than a little *passée* with the wearing, according to some critics, but by no means outgrown altogether ; at least for those who take a natural delight in daintiness, in the gracefully frail and delicate. Outgrown as students' garb, in any case, they certainly are not ; and it is with students and their necessities that we are chiefly concerned here. And it must also be admitted that the fashion, while it lasted, gave birth to such charming creations as deserve to be, and have been, permanently embalmed in literature ; just as art has preserved for us the Kate Greenaway hat and Dolly Varden bonnet.

Henley's "What Is to Come" is one of the rondeau form's imperishable things ; a masterpiece not only of ingenuity but of poetry, and of serious poetry at that. It has the grave music, austere and august, which always comes as a surprise from these light instruments. Every student of this form should read it, with Andrew Lang's admirable examples, and, of course, Austin Dobson's. This, too, is a correct model :—

They bid us fight each other ; they who hold  
 The sceptre of rule ; the powers that have controlled  
 The peoples from the first, our work and will  
 To their own idols sacrificing still,  
 War-gods of iron, market-gods of gold.

And still to nobler warfare, as of old,  
 Peace calls, and Freedom : foes of hunger and cold,  
 Oppression, ignorance, they would have us kill,  
                   They bid us fight.

Hear we and heed ! Under one flag enrolled,  
 As many flocks seeking the common fold,  
 Join we the nobler army Peace shall drill  
 For bloodless battle, armed with strength and skill  
 By Freedom taught. They lead us forth ; behold,  
                   They bid us fight.

Fifteen lines inclusive of the refrain, it will be noticed, compose the rondeau. Two rhymes only are allowed, and they must always be arranged as in the above example. The refrain occurs, first, at the beginning of the first five-line stanza ; then at the end of the second, of four lines ; and again as the sixth line of the third and the climax of the whole. In the second and third stanzas it must form a line by itself. Note that it is *unrhymed* ; an important point which many students fail to observe. This rhymeless refrain is one of the special characteristics of the rondeau, and one particularly differentiating it from its next-of-kin the roundel.

Slurred syllables will often greatly enhance the music and charm of a rondeau, as in this line :

I have wrought, I have wept, I have wearied : let me die.

But here lies a pitfall for the unwary follower, who may, under the impression that he is faithfully copying his model, huddle into the strait measure

of the decasyllabic line<sup>1</sup> syllables which cannot be slurred ! Imagine the effect of these thirteen syllables substituted for those given above :

Loose the rein, free the steed, break the trammels,  
each and all.

Metre and structure would be ruined : there would remain only a jumbled, huddled medley of words impossible to scan. Yet the *number* of the syllables would be the same precisely. "And the moral of that is"—keep strictly within your chosen metre, if you cannot recognise, "by ear," as musicians say, which syllables will slur easily and which will not. Some vowels—or aspirates following vowels, as in the example quoted—glide easily and naturally into each other. Others are inelastic and, moreover, incongruous : to force them together is to produce a discord intolerable to ears able to detect it.

The rondel is much less popular than its sister form the roundel. As written in these days it has twin rhymes, comprised in thirteen lines. The first line reappears as the seventh and thirteenth, the second being repeated in the eighth. Here is an example. The rhymes should follow this arrangement :

#### THE SAILOR'S WIFE

I praised the land where there is no more sea ;  
You loved the sea above all lands, you said.  
Three honeymoons had waned since we were wed ;  
Now wedded years we count by thirty-three.  
How feared I, then, my rival's enmity !  
I knew her fair—ah, fair and fierce and dread !  
I praised the land where there is no more sea ;  
You loved the sea, above all lands, you said.

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<sup>1</sup> Rondeaux are not, it should be said, necessarily restricted to a decasyllabic line. The octosyllabic, for instance, is used in many famous examples.

But even now, when far away from me  
 You voyage where the lone rock rears its head  
 Above the wave by mad winds buffeted,  
 I feel as when, by Ocean's loveliest glee,  
 I praised the land where there is no more sea.

The villanelle has been aptly described by one of its aptest exponents<sup>1</sup> as "a double-clappered silver bell," and one that must be made to "clink in time."

The double refrain consisting of its first and third lines is its most characteristic feature. It contains exactly nineteen lines, arranged in five triplets and a final quatrain. The twin rhymes are grouped thus: *a b a* in the first fifteen lines; *a b a a* in the last four. This is a correct example :

#### LOVE AMONG THE LILIES

She said she loved the lily-bell—  
 She by the lily's name was known—  
 I loved the Lily, passing well !

We loitered in a wild-wood dell ;  
 White bells I culled, for her alone.  
 She said she loved the lily-bell.

She knew the thing she would not tell :  
 A lily was her heart, half-blown.  
 I loved the Lily, passing well !

Her taste and mine ran parallel :  
 My soul to hers, pure white, had grown ;  
 She said she loved the lily-bell.

She guessed (ask Love how it befell  
 That all was seen, that all was shown !)  
 I loved the Lily, passing well !

---

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Henley.

Missed we the rose's crimson cell?  
 The white stars on our way were sown!  
 She said she loved the lily-bell;  
 I loved the Lily, passing well!

The student should also read, as one of the best possible models in this form, the brilliant "Villanelle of a Villanelle" by W. E. Henley, already cited as a delightful description of its scope and nature. Probably the only poet who has ever approached his consummate mastery of these forms is the late Andrew Lang, whose examples should be studied with his.

Of the pantoum I need give no specimen here; no form being, perhaps, so useless to the student for whom these pages are written. Even the masterly hand of the artist who wrought the "Essays in Old French Forms" can only make of it "a toy of song" (in the "In Town" experiment; though this is, I believe, the best example extant). The constant reappearance of the second and fourth lines of one quatrain as the first and third of the next has a distinctly irritating effect; at least, when the experiment is prolonged beyond the brief limits of a villanelle, to which this sister form is not restricted. Anyone wanting to try his hand at a pantoum, however—I must confess that I did in my salad days, early youth being capable of any literary enormity,—has only to see that he writes in quatrains, with two rhymes only, throughout the poem; that his second and fourth line in one verse, as above indicated, recur as the first and third of the next; and that his last line of all repeats his first. And I wish him joy of the result!

## IX

### THE DIXAIN — THE SESTINA — THE CHANT-ROYAL — OBJECTIONS TO THE OLD FRENCH METRES—THEIR USE AND PLACE IN POETRY

THE dixain is so little known and so seldom used that it may be said to have a place apart among metres of French origin. With the old troubadour tunes, indeed, it is not to be classed: for one thing, it lacks the refrain which, as we have seen, is their distinguishing characteristic. This very absence of iteration—even of that “silver iterance” which the refrain metres assume under the hands of their masters—gives the form a distinctive dignity which makes it particularly worthy of notice. I have seen poetry of noble and haunting beauty written in it, the finest example being unfortunately unobtainable as a model, for reasons of copyright. Here, however, is another which may serve the student’s purpose equally well:—

Up on the heights, the white eternal places,  
The cold strikes inward; bare the land and bleak.  
Far off, too far for sympathy, the faces  
Of alien stars, that lack the light we seek.  
Yet turn not thence, wan climber! Climb yet longer  
And farther, higher! Let thy heart beat stronger!  
Hard, hard the way; yet forward, upward plod!  
For suddenly, at the end, the snow-gleam whitens  
To something whiter yet; and Somewhat brightens  
More than the stars above thee—is it God?



The ideal dixain, however, takes a more even, less broken course than this syncopated, over-punctuated example. Here is another which flows more smoothly :

Let us beware, while yet we live together,  
 Of aught to shadow kindred mind or heart,  
 To interrupt the days of pleasant weather,  
 For dark are those that must be lived apart.  
 But darkest far because the word unspoken  
 Haunts then the silence never to be broken  
 In this world ; and because of deeds undone.  
 Wherefore let every act and word be tender  
 Ere yet the precious dust to dust we render,—  
 Ere, where two walked, Death leaves but room  
 for one.

The dixain, the observant student will have noted, is now written as a single stanza of ten lines, of which the fifth and sixth should be joined together without a break ; precisely as, in the sonnet, the last line of the octave used to be joined on to the first of the sestet. And that word brings us naturally to the sestina, the next form to be studied here.

Arranged, as its name implies, in six stanzas, of six lines each, the sestina resembles the dixain in having no refrain line. Its repetitions are in its terminal words. Each of the six used in the first verse must be repeated in all the others ; but arranged in a different order every time. The first of each verse after the opening one, being the last of its predecessor, is an "echo rhyme." These terminals must also recur in the final triplet (where, the student may be warned, it is not always easy to get them all in satisfactorily !). Rudyard Kipling's "Sestina of the Tramp-Royal" is an excellent example of the blank-verse form to

which these poems were formerly restricted. The same rule as to the "echo" terminal applies to the rhymed form and the rhymeless. Modern experiments are frequently rhymed, two or three assonances being allowed at discretion. Here is a specimen of the rhymed form :

### THE END OF A HOLIDAY

Pippa's—for still she passes—exultation  
 Blithe in her heart because of one day's splendour,  
 And in her voice her youth's anticipation  
 Of other, richer gifts that Time may render.  
 Surely her voice has thrilled this City station  
 To memories of a world more blithe and tender !

At Epping did she see the light grow tender  
 Through shadowing green, and feel Earth's exultation  
 In winds that shook the brown cones from their station,  
 In great lights kindled by the sunset splendour ?  
 At Margate did she watch the sand's surrender  
 And the strong sea's fulfilled anticipation ?

Half her delight was in anticipation,  
 Through the slow weeks that nursed a hope how tender  
 Of fairy boons which one bright day should render.  
 All its bequest is now an exultation  
 In a departed bliss, a vanished splendour :  
 Yet how her smile lights up this London station !

Blithe bees, that have in yonder hive your station,  
 New sweets already in anticipation  
 Tasting, in autumn the new summer's splendour  
 Forecasting,—Winter other gifts shall tender  
 Full surely ! will they dim your exultation  
 And bend your heart's brave cheer to sad surrender ?

Somewhere its toll to death glad life must render—  
 Life, the swift train whirled on to one grey station.  
 Yet sing, to-day, your song of exultation !  
 As Retrospect be kind, Anticipation,  
 To smoothe a little while for feet so tender  
 This toil-worn path, and turn it all to splendour !

For Pippa's one great day must shed its splendour  
 On her whole year : no other this shall render,  
 In its drab length, to match a glow so tender.  
 Slow-creeping Care behind her takes his station,  
 Chill fears belie her hope's anticipation ;  
 This day alone is hers for exultation.

And exultation ends, and sunset splendour  
 Wanes : her last station see the Day surrender !  
 Anticipation, thy sweet solace tender !

The last of these forms which we need to examine here is the chant-royal. By far the most dignified and elaborate of all the old French metres, it is also the most difficult—"diabolically difficult," to quote a modern verse-critic. It is, however, a more suitable vehicle for serious thought, a better and fitter medium for serious verse, than any of the other refrain-metres ; though excellent comic verse has been written in it, too, by writers undaunted by its pitfalls and wary in escaping them. It has five stanzas of eleven lines each, and a five-line final verse ; just sixty lines in all, with only six rhymes among them ! These must be arranged in the following order in each of the five verses :—Light, fire, white, mire ; blue, dew, rose, snows, chill, blows, hill. The five-line "Envoy" has this rhyme-scheme ; strictly confined, of course, to the previous rhymes : Shows, throws, will, knows, still. (Some very elementary students may need to be told that new words must be found to fit the old rhymes, in every case !)

This is a chant-royal which may be given as a correct model :

### MARCH HARES

In the rich dawning of our days we went,

Two babes together, to a dew-lit field.

The daffodils their yellow lustre lent

To dim groves, treasures of wealth concealed.

Mad as March hares down hill and dale we flew,  
Drunk with the wine of Spring, a magic brew ;

And pulled the daffodils, and found the nest

Whence the swift lark his flight to heaven addressed ;  
Or watched the little fish glance, silver-finned,

Or played at hunters—that game pleased us best—  
Chasing March hares across a world of wind !

In the clear morning of our days we spent,

Two maids together, hours no frost congealed.

Life we desired, with hearts how confident—

Life, then a flower unplucked, a fruit unpeeled.

O me, what dreams we nursed, what plans we drew,  
All of the fairy world where dreams come true !

The mountains should be conquered, crest by crest,

And Fame yield up her prize at Youth's behest.

Each saw on either's breast her favour pinned—

Still hunters, in a visionary quest

Chasing March hares across a world of wind !

In the full noontide of our days we meant,

Two knights together, knightly arms to wield,

Scorning the risk of knightly accident—

Was not the Truth our sword, the Right our shield ?

Our wounds would heal, our palms would all men strew—  
Ah, friend, how little of the war we knew !

The wounds are here, deep wounds in brow and breast,

And neither balm nor palm. We stood the test,

Yet missed the goal : the glittering ranks are thinned ;

And all life seems, under the waning west,

Chasing March hares across a world of wind !

In the grey twilight of our day's descent,  
Two fallen together, yet we find revealed  
The glory of the lost, last tournament :  
What if we might not win ? We would not yield.  
We tracked the Spring along her path of dew :  
How green the earth was then, the heavens how blue,  
Let us bear witness ! let our praise attest ;  
Yea, though to-day we tread a road unblest.  
Though ever at our feast the death-mask grinned,  
Write we of life, on its last palimpsest,  
"Chasing March hares across a world of wind ?"

So in the night of all our days,—content,  
Two spirits together, to be hushed and healed,—  
Like wayward children kissed and penitent,  
We shall go forth as to a fount unsealed,  
And drink deep draughts of peace that shall accrue  
Unto all war ; till braced and armed anew  
We fare forth on adventures here unguessed,  
Our sorrows calmed and all our sins confessed,  
In lands where none has sorrowed or has sinned,  
And where heaven's knights may smile to see the rest  
Chasing March hares across a world of wind !

## ENVOY

Choosing the world of knightly joust and geste,  
Though right were never on earth made manifest,  
Would we that early choice recall, rescind ?  
Good still would be the race, the road, the zest,  
Chasing March hares across a world of wind !

Before we leave the subject of these "fair old tunes of France," it may be as well to examine the objections urged against them by many modern critics. Such egg-shell china, it is alleged, can only occupy an inferior niche in the Muse's cabinet ; can have no permanent place among her treasures, bric-à-brac being notoriously brittle.

This literary trifling, these writers insist, is but trifling when all is said and done; maintaining that Shakespeare and Milton and Dante would have disdained it. And at best, they argue, it can but furnish the decorative fringe of Poetry's royal robe; the light relief of her graver, loftier moods and moments. Allowing this—and we hardly can allow it in view of Christina Rossetti's use of the roundel,—we may still dispute these critics' estimate of embellishment. "Relief" has its place and use in the picture. In other words, the Muses are as delightful at play as at work.

I have often had occasion to cite and quote the work of Mr Austin Dobson in this field. It is fitting that he, and no other, should seal the final vindication of that "Jocosa Lyra" which few have played so well or with such accomplished ease and charm:

O, the song where not one of the Graces  
Tight-laces,  
Where we woo the sweet Muses not starchly,  
But archly;

Where the verse, like a piper a-Maying,  
Comes playing,  
And the rhyme is as gay as a dancer  
In answer;

—It will last till men weary of pleasure  
In measure!  
It will last till men weary of laughter . . .  
And after!

## X

### GREEK METRES IN ENGLISH POETRY

I'm not over-fond of Greek metres in English ;  
To me rhyme's a gain, so it be not too jinglish,

declares Lowell in his witty *Fable for Critics* ; adding, however, that even the exquisite literary sense of Theocritus would

Scarce change a line  
Of that rare, tender, virgin-like pastoral "Evangeline."

"Evangeline" and "The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich"—an impossibly cumbrous title, changed by the late W. T. Stead in his admirable "Penny Poets" series to "A Young Man's Love-Story"—are two of the best-known examples of hexameters in English. And it should be added that Longfellow's "idyll in hexameters" and Clough's charming pastoral (which is also an idyll in its way) are the most interesting, as well as the best, specimens of this kind of work for the student to begin on. Both, however, contain not a few lines which refuse to scan in accordance with the strict laws of the metre. Even Tennyson was not absolutely successful in teaching "the strong-winged music of Homer" to soar in alien air, and was humorously conscious of the fact.

Longfellow's hexameters and Clough's, nevertheless, are enriched by passage after passage of impeccable regularity or of memorable beauty: the two do not invariably, in these examples,



coincide. Curiously enough, two of the most notable of Longfellow's lines and three of Clough's deal with the same theme—with stars and flowers. These are from "Evangeline": a famous passage which most readers will remember:

Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,  
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the  
angels.

And these from "The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich"; not so well known as it deserves to be:

Star is not equal to star, nor blossom the same as  
blossom;

Herb is not equal to herb, any more than planet to  
planet;

There is a glory of daisies, a glory again of carnations.

A perfect hexametric line—more regularly and classically perfect than either of the above specimens—occurs in the Book of Job:

Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort  
a little.

Elegiacs differ from hexameters only in their alternation of "double" with "single" terminals. In other words, one line ends with two syllables accented on the first, the next with a monosyllable. Here is a magnificent specimen by Sir William Watson, taken from the "Hymn to the Sea":

While, with throes, with raptures, with loosing of  
bonds, with unsealings,

Arrowy pangs of delight, piercing the core of the  
world,

Tremors and coy unfoldings, reluctances, sweet agi-  
tations,

Youth, irrepressibly fair, wakes like a wondering rose.

Tennyson's experiment in *leonine elegiacs*, included in his "Juvenilia," is a good model. This metre differs from the more usual elegiac form only in its internal rhymes. Some beginners may welcome an example. Two lines from Tennyson's will suffice :—

Creeping thro' blossomy rushes and bowers of rose-  
blowing bushes  
Down by the poplar tall rivulets babble and fall.

Both these metres are composed of dactyls and spondees ; the dactyl being a foot of three syllables accented on the first, like *Lymington* ; the spondee, a foot of two with an equally strong stress on each, like *Guide Bridge*. Accent, in English verse, takes the place of quantity in Greek or Latin ; quantity being the *length* of a syllable, the time taken in pronouncing it. In this line from Mrs Browning's "Vision of Poets,"

Consummating where they consume,

the last syllable is the longest ; and so in the word *exhume*. That word is a good illustration of the two different kinds of quantity—always either short or long.

The three metres most commonly employed in English verse, in one or other of their innumerable variations, are the iambic, the trochaic, and the anapæstic ; or, to speak more accurately, the English equivalents of these. The classic forms on which our modern variants of them are founded are not really reproducible in our language ; chiefly because, as we have just seen, accented and unaccented syllables must with us stand for the long and short ones of Homer's tongue. In English verse, then an iambus or iamb is a

dissyllable like *delight*, the accent falling on the second half of the word. A trochee consists of two syllables accented on the first, like *duty*. And an anapæst has three, accented on the last, like *incomplete*.

Here are examples of all three metres: an iambic line from Mrs Browning, a trochaic one from Robert Browning, and an anapæstic from Lowell; each divided into feet, or "scanned":

#### IAMBIC

God's *proph* | ets of | the *Beau* | tiful.

#### TROCHAIC

*There's* a | *woman* | *like* a | *dewdrop*, | *she's* so | *pur*er  
than the | *purest*.

#### ANAPÆSTIC

That the *mu* | sic had *some* | how got *mixed* | with the  
*whole*.

As we have noted, all these metres are infinitely variable, in the sense that they are written in stanzas and rhyme-schemes *ad libitum*. Iambic metre is the most popular of all, and the most flexible and adaptable; ranging from the stately blank-verse pentameter hallowed by Milton's use and Shakespeare's, and the "heroic couplets" of Pope (both to be dealt with more fully in ensuing chapters), to the simplicities of common-metre.

Two other poetic feet the student may be required to scan or to define: the amphibrach,

a foot of three syllables accented on the second, like *delightful* ; and the tribrach, represented by the last three syllables of such words as *formidable*, *amicable*, *amiable*. These, as tribrachs, would be scanned thus, the accented syllable being properly outside the foot :

(Form) idable | (am) icable | (a) miable.

Only three more of the Greek metres need detain the student at this stage of his progress : sapphics, alcaics, and hendecasyllables.

*Sapphics*, so called from Sappho's use of them in her incomparable lyric fragments, may be classed with the most beautiful and the most difficult of all the classic metres. Swinburne handles this form with a giant's ease ; Mr Hardy less smoothly, but with characteristic vigour, in "The Temporary the All." Southey's well-known experiment, "The Widow," misses the roll and sweep of the true Lesbian line, which the best examples recapture and preserve. The following stanzas are true to the Sapphic model. Students should particularly observe the stress and scansion of the three longer lines in hendecasyllables. The shorter final line (containing five syllables instead of eleven) presents few difficulties :

Then I saw—or guessed at the sight and dreamed it—  
Heights untrod by man in the world of mortals ;  
Saw thy white unscalable peaks, Perfection,  
    Boundless and endless.

Higher they than peaks of the Himalayas :  
Who may carve his name on their front of marble,  
Like the Lion once, at Lucerne the lovely,  
    Carved by Thorwaldsen ?

*Alcaics* may be studied in Tennyson's famous example:

O mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies,  
 O skill'd to sing of Time and Eternity,  
     God-gifted organ-voice of England,  
 Milton, a name to resound for ages!

His ingenious and delightful experiment in hendecasyllables we need not quote, that line being Sappho's, which may be scanned and analysed in the specimen given above.

Before leaving the subject of classic Greek metres in English, we must refer the student to Canon Langbridge's remarkable experiment, "An Obscure Poet," now included in a collection issued by Messrs John Richmond. Here the ordinary "blank-verse pentameter" line slips easily into hexameters of varying type.<sup>1</sup> I select a specimen of each line used:

If earth had beckoned her; if she had passed,

. . . . .

Slowly receding through the fading twilight,

. . . . .

I should have breathed with the winds and have  
     flowed with the waters,

. . . . .

Sure as the path of a star, heart-kind as the smile of  
     a cowslip,

. . . . .

A beautiful isle of repose, with its wing on the waters.

. . . . .

Roll'd as a wave, yet guarded as a jewel.

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<sup>1</sup> Also into the line used by F. W. Myers in his *St. Paul* stanza. See the second and last quoted as specimens.

## XI

### BLANK VERSE

THIS measure, described by one of the most accomplished of living artists in verse<sup>1</sup> as "that noble and distinctively English possession . . . a more perfect vehicle of thought and feeling than even the great metre of antiquity," is emphatically the most hopeless for the tyro. Many readers will recall the old joke at the unskilful versifier's expense: "I hear that Jobson writes blank verse?" "Yes, very blank!" And blank, indeed, is most of the verse written in the great Miltonic measure; an instrument into which the "God-gifted organ-voice of England" breathed so much, but which, lacking the authentic breath of the wind of poetry, yields so ludicrously little.

Nearly all beginners say that they find it much easier to write in what they are pleased to call "blank verse" than in any other metre; this, of course, because there are no rhymes to find. That very fact, were they wise enough to discern it, constitutes the measure's chief difficulty. Rhyme is the beginner's best friend; it checks his inveterate looseness, reins in his thought which gallops too headily; curbs, in a word, that fatal facility which runs away with him and leads him nowhere. Without rhyme he is almost certain to fall short of music; infinitely more difficult to attain without than with it. For, in the rhymeless form, music depends altogether on the subtleties of pausing and

<sup>1</sup> Sir William Watson in *Pencraft*.

phrasing ; on subtly-shifted accents and vowel-sounds carefully arranged ; on liquid and harsh consonants judiciously intermixed. Of all this, of course, the bold beginner discerns nothing. Blank verse—and by that term I mean here the orthodox rhymeless pentameter—is not to him what it should be to all lovers of poetry : the measure sanctified by Milton's habitual use in epic and Shakespeare's in drama ; the Sacred Ark of poetic revelations so verily inspired that none should venture to lay on it unauthorised hands. It is simply a measure which *looks* easy ; one you need not chop up into stanzas or tag with terminal assonances ; one you may write at any length and (it would seem from the common practice) anyhow. Lengths—I had almost said chunks—of verse ; pages of meandering description or interminable narrative ; a desert of veritable blankness, only, and hardly, fenced in by the necessity to cut it up into the prescribed ten-syllabled lines,—that is the average beginner's notion of the metre of *Paradise Lost* and *Comus*, *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ; of *Tintern Abbey*, too, and the *Idylls of the King* ! Let him study all these, carefully and earnestly, if he would know of what rich varieties of music that much-abused metre is capable ; of what subtle harmonies and *nuances* of tone-colour. Innumerable inflexions and gradations of sound, as of meaning, lie within its boundaries, as all its masters know.

Here are a few specimens recalled at random from their hiding-place among the treasures of memory :

The morn,  
Waked by the circling hours, with rosy hand  
Unbarred the gates of light.  
More tunable than needed lute or harp  
To add more sweetness.



Others, more mild,  
Retreated in a silent valley, sing  
With notes angelical to many a harp,  
Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall  
By doom of battle.

Not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of night or morn.

So much the rather thou, Celestial Light,  
Shine inward.

These from *Paradise Lost*. And these from  
Shakespeare:

She looks like sleep,  
As she would catch another Antony  
In her strong toil of grace.

*Juliet.*

Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day.  
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,  
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;  
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree:  
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

*Romeo.*

It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks  
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:  
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain-tops.  
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

And there is nothing left remarkable  
Beneath the visiting moon.

No one, in these passages and a thousand of  
equal power and beauty, misses the rhymes;  
because the poetry in them is born of music's

essential self, which needs not rhyme for its adornment. But compare them with this effort of one uninspired, apparently, with anything but the desire to "make a poem (!) in blank verse":

I walked along the road and trod the grass,  
And saw and smelt the roses by the way,  
And praised the sky so blue and brilliant,  
And thought that I would have a glad day then,  
As happy as the birds that sang near me.

Note the violent, awkward stress on "me" (in honest, plain prose it would be naturally thrown on "near"); the trailing, dragging-out sound of "brill-i-ant"; the spondee wrongly substituted for an iambus in "day then"; the triteness of the thought, matching the clumsiness of its expression. Only one whose mind is steeped and soaked in the blank verse of Shakespeare and Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson (and even Wordsworth made some pitiful slips in this metre, among his great achievements in it) should think he knows "blank verse" well enough to attempt it. Even then it should only be attempted by the student with a natural, an inborn gift for poetry.

We have examined thus far only the standard, classic form stereotyped as "blank verse" *par excellence*: the iambic pentameter. But there are many other rhymeless metres used by standard poets—Tennyson's "Merlin and the Gleam" and Matthew Arnold's "Rugby Chapel" and "The Future" being among the best and most popular examples. Another, even more popular, is the beautiful trochaic and octasyllabic metre of "Hiawatha," doubly famous through Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's delightful setting. Henley's "Song of the Sword" is a celebrated modern example of rhymeless verse that is by no means formless:

and Sir William Watson's "England, my Mother" supplies a notable demonstration of how rhythm may take the place of rhyme in quatrains. The same metre which he uses in that admirably vigorous poem may be written in octaves, thus :

Beauty triumphant,  
Beauty of Nature,  
Beauty of all things,  
    Say what thou art?  
Nature thou art not,  
Though she reveals thee:  
Art thou not Spirit?  
    Art thou not God?

Blank verse, then, must never be blank. It must be so arranged that the rhymes are not *conspicuous* by their absence. It must express meaning by music and invest music with meaning. Then it is not only an instrument but an orchestra.

## XII

### THE HEROIC COUPLET— NARRATIVE VERSE

PRACTICALLY the only difference between blank verse and heroic couplets is the terminal tag that one needs and the other doesn't, gaily concludes the uninitiated versifier. He is wrong. The whole spirit differs with the structure. It is possible, of course, to write heroic couplets in the heroic manner: Dryden did so habitually; so did several of Pope's lesser contemporaries; and Pope himself, as all his readers know, could do anything with the measure. Milton's use of it, in his translations of his own Latin poems, shows the true Miltonic dignity and gravity. But the inherent requirements of the metre do not lie in this direction: it is not, in a characteristically Irish definition, "blank verse written in rhyme." The rhymeless pentameter should be built up in stately fashion, like Greek or Gothic architecture; the rhymed demands *felicity* rather than dignity of arrangement; demands smoothness, symmetry, the neat jointing and balancing of parts rather than the mingled gravity and grandeur which we express by the word "majesty" in the whole. It is, in the main and broadly, the difference between a tragedy-queen and Titania. The blank verse of *Comus* is a magnificent example of

how that measure should be written ; so, in its widely different way, is *Enoch Arden* ; so are (still more conspicuously) the *Idylls of the King*.<sup>1</sup> *The Rape of the Lock*, on the other hand, even more than the *Essay on Man*, illustrates the neatness and ornateness of the decasyllabic couplet.

But there are couplets *and* couplets ; manners many, though the metre is one. Belinda and her attendant sylphs<sup>2</sup> may trip it neatly and featly through an ordered eighteenth-century parterre ; but there is, at least, a suggestion of larger horizons here ;<sup>3</sup> a vista of other than landscape-gardening.

Who sees, with equal eye, as God of all,  
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,  
Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,  
And now a bubble burst, and now a world ;

Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,  
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart ;  
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,  
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns ;

To him no high, no low, no great, no small ;  
He fills, He bounds, connects, and equals all.

This is the heroic couplet turned to Uranian uses, sung in the Dorian mood. But because of its inherent nature (the neat precision of the claspings rhyme which fastens off each twinned line) the Phrygian or Lydian suits it better. Note the gay mock-heroics in the culminating scene of *The Rape of the Lock*, where Belinda, absorbed

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, and the finest of Shakespeare's blank verse passages, being examples too well known to call for citation in this connection.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Rape of the Lock*.

<sup>3</sup> From the *Essay on Man*.

in coffee-making, lost her ringlet by her admirer's scissors :

Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace  
 A two-edged weapon from her shining case :  
 So Ladies in Romance assist their Knight,  
 Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.  
 He takes the gift with reverence, and extends  
 The little engine on his fingers' ends ;  
 This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,  
 As o'er the fragrant steams she bent her head.  
 Swift to the Lock a thousand Sprites repair,  
 A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair ;  
 And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear ;  
 Thrice she looked back and thrice the foe drew near.

Even then before the fatal engine closed,  
 A wretched Sylph too fondly interposed ;  
 Fate urged the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain  
 (But airy substance soon unites again) ;  
 The meeting points the sacred hair dis sever  
 From the fair head, for ever and for ever !

It should also be noted that the poetry of dreamy romance, of Arcadian pastorals, of Greek or Norse myths and the like, is particularly well suited to this metre's requirements. Rather, the metre fits itself to the poetry's as the glove to the hand ; always supposing that an artist, with due knowledge of its possibilities and power to turn them to the best account, employs it. Rightly used for such purposes, it seems a different thing from Pope's characteristic metre, as seen in either of the examples quoted. The lines glide into one another with a slow, smooth river's flow, and with its music ; telling, like it, a tale of pleasant, placid meadows, full of flowers and haunted by old legends and old loves. William Morris never showed better judgment than when he chose this metre,

modulated to this manner, for so many of the "Earthly Paradise" stories. Nothing could suit them better; the very spirit of old romance seems to brood above and float between the linked lines. Keats was equally inspired when he chose it as the one fit measure for "Endymion" and "Lamia"; though the inordinate length of the former, so justly complained of by Shelley, prevents many readers from discovering the wisdom of the choice in that instance. "Lamia," however, lays no such embargo on our patience, and shows quite as clearly that delicate adjustment of the metre to the theme which poetry demands. Would any other metre have been possible, either, for "Sleep and Poetry"? The very title, the very subject, asked a measure that could glide uninterruptedly, flow evenly, in regular, rhythmic pulsing; like an infant's breath during sleep, or the heart when its beat is tranquil. Keats had the poetic wisdom which knows not only its materials but how to use them; a knowledge incommunicable and, like the source of inspiration itself, "more secret than a nest of nightingales."

Many students, having a tale to tell in verse, are puzzled as to the best metre for the telling. The heroic couplet used in William Morris's manner<sup>1</sup> would seem the ideal medium. A metre with frequent breaks and changes is not ideally suitable for narrative verse, which should suggest a smooth recital varied only to suit the incidents recorded; music quiet but undulant, capable of modulation, and therefore never degenerating into "mellifluous monotony." The "Earthly Paradise" stories written in this measure are among the best

<sup>1</sup> Or Sir William Watson's in the "Prince's Quest." This, as revised in the "Collected Poems," is one of the most delightful of recent examples.



possible models for the poetic story. The story itself is told with that narrative power and charm for the lack of which no poetic ornaments could compensate, interest being the main thing in stories of every kind. There is much to be said in favour of Scott's favourite metre, the "ringing octosyllabics" of "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake," occasionally (and most effectively) varied by a change into a more lyrical metre; and no less for the blank verse Tennyson uses in the "Princess," the "Idylls," and such shorter masterpieces as "Enoch Arden," "Aylmer's Field," "Dora," and "The Brook." But, on the whole, the most flexible and adaptable of all the narrative measures would appear to be this one: couplets with a rare, an occasional triplet to vary them. A favourite device to add still further variety is the linking on of one strophe or section, by the rhyme, to another. Rossetti, for one, uses it with particularly fine effect, as one of his critics<sup>1</sup> has pointed out. Such devices are, of course, especially necessary in experimental verse.

This description of a girl in her first youth, taken from "The Lovers of Gudrun" in the Morrisian saga, will show both the music of the metre and its flexibility. The accents do not fall strictly in place always, but the metre is more musical than if they did:

That spring was she just come to her full height.  
Low-bosomed yet she was, and slim and light,  
Yet scarce might she grow fairer from that day.

Bluer than grey her eyes were; somewhat thin  
Her marvellous red lips; round was her chin,  
Cloven, and clear-wrought; like an ivory tower  
Her neck rose up from love's white-veiled bower.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Arthur Christopher Benson in his monograph on Rossetti.

And some thought rose within the heart of her  
Which made her eyes bright, her cheeks ruddier  
Than was their wont ; yet were they delicate  
As are the changing steps of high heaven's gate.

Does not this entice the reader's interest ? make him want to know Gudrun, and all her story ? Which is, naturally, the chief art and secret of narrative verse. Yet another appropriate metre for it is rhyme-royal, as used by Chaucer ; the stanza of the lovely "Patient Griselda" <sup>1</sup> and St Cecilia <sup>2</sup> stories (to name no others) in the *Canterbury Tales*. But this measure must be examined under another heading.

<sup>1</sup> *The Clerk of Oxford's Tale.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Second Nun's Tale.*

## XIII

### A LESSON ON BALLADS

THE ballad is probably one of the earliest forms, if not absolutely the earliest, in which poetic art took shape in these islands. Certainly ballads were sung in England, by the wandering minstrels of whom every child reads in his history—gleemen and glee-maidens, or *jongleuses*, who went from castle to cottage and from hamlet to town,—far back in the beginnings of English life. Stopford Brooke, one of the most distinguished and delightful of scholars, as of verse-critics, tells us of the “rude ballads” which grew up round the Robin Hood tradition; of the lovely little idyll-ballad of “The Owl and the Nightingale,” written about 1280, and the still earlier “Ballad on the Battle of Lewes,” written, probably, a generation before that. “The Nut-Browne Mayde” is one of the best known, as well as the first printed, of these minstrel tales, exclusive of the Robin Hood collections; and in most points it is admirably true to type. It is, in fact, a characteristic, representative specimen of the early ballad-poetry, at home here long before Chaucer wrote.

But far more beautiful, for the most part, are the early Scotch and Border ballads. Every

student who has followed up the subject knows of Scott's diligent explorations in this field in his poetic youth, and of the golden "yield" he found there; harvested for later seekers in the *Border Minstrelsy* collection. Only the other day a critic was wondering why all the best ballads were written in the Scots dialect; a fact which the doughtiest upholder of Southron superiority will hardly venture to dispute. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's ingenious theory of single authorship may explain it. It would be hard to find "marrows" in early or later English literature, in any case, for "Helen of Kirkconnell," "Waly, Waly," "The Gay Goss-Hawk," and "The Lass of Lochroyan"—all anonymous, and all so lovely that they have worked their way not only into the language but into the general heart and memory. The "grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence," so justly praised as such by Coleridge, is also written in Scots, and is, perhaps, the only equal of those above mentioned.

Scotland, unquestionably, made most of the ballad form, did most with it; wrought most of the fine stuff of poetry into its homespun fabric of primitive passion and romance. But it was, let us admit, the loom of another land on which it was woven first. It originated in France (like so many other forms since domiciled in English verse); whence, according to a recent writer who has taken pains to search out its sources, it spread to Germany and Denmark, and so crossed the North Sea with the Danish traders to find a new channel in the Scottish Lowlands. Percy's *Reliques* is, as most students know, the standard book of ballads.

The old examples came into being, of course, long before Caxton and the first printing-press.

The ballads were learned by heart and caught up by ear, transmitted from one to another by word of mouth, and finally written down in a form probably showing many divergences from the original text. Glee-men and *jongleuses* sang them at feasts, usually to an accompanying dance by two or more dancers, who were supposed to keep step with the verse-music and the minstrel's harp. Alfred the Great himself may have sung some of these ballads in his minstrel disguise, in the days when English poetry was struggling to the birth; and the ancient Irish heroes, whose names are half myth and half memory, had their own ballad-minstrelsy, commemorating their own and their dim forefathers' exploits to the music of Tara's earliest harp.

The ballad is really a cross between the lyric and the romantic narrative poem. It must be spirited, simple and musical like the former, which it also resembles in its necessity for unity of thought and theme; and it must tell a story like the latter, and one of vivid and romantic interest. It has not, however, the lyric's need of brevity; though some few of the older ballad masterpieces ("Waly, Waly" and "Helen of Kirkconnell" in particular) are as short as they are strong. Some of the best *modernised* ballads—quite the best keep to the ancient form described below—are Campbell's "Battle of the Baltic" and "Lord Ullin's Daughter," Scott's "Young Lochinvar" and "Jock of Hazeldean," and Tennyson's "Revenge" and "Relief of Lucknow." But far better than these as ballads, though Tennyson greatly surpasses them as poetry, are those of William Morris, such as "Two Red Roses Across the Moon" and "The Gilliflower of Gold"—better, because truer to the original ballad-form.

This, in its purest type, has certain special rules and requirements. Sometimes it has a refrain, reminiscent of the days when the ballad was made to be sung to the harp and the dance; it should have, in any case, a judicious admixture of archaisms or archaic pronunciations ("ladye," "chapèlle," "sistèr," and the like); and usually, though not invariably, it adheres to the original ballad-metre: an elastic common-metre varied with an occasional longer stanza, and with various other charming irregularities which, being introduced *ad libitum*, must be studied in individual examples.

By far the best and most beautiful specimen of this ballad-metre will be found in Coleridge's masterpiece, "The Ancient Mariner," probably the most wonderful ballad-story ever written. G. K. Chesterton's of "The White Horse" is a splendid modern example—splendid in the true sense of the word, for it flames and glows with the light of romance and the ardour of chivalry. Mrs Browning's "Romaunt of the Page" is another particularly noble specimen of this kind of poetry. But it has been said, and I think truly, that in the modern ballad of ancient form, with the archaisms proper to it, "Rossetti alone has the true historical touch." His great ballad, "The King's Tragedy," is a pure example, true to type in every way; in romanticism of theme and treatment, in variations of metre and stanza, in vivid interest of narrative, and in archaisms of language never artificial, never overdone. The noble tale of Catherine Douglass was never so nobly told.

Here is an example of the ancient ballad, showing both its original common-metre and the musical irregularities varying this:

Oh have ye tint,<sup>1</sup> at tournament,  
 Your sword, or yet your spear,  
 Or mourn ye for the southern lass  
 Whom ye may not win near?

And weel he kent that ladye fair  
 Amang her maidens free;  
 For the flower that springs in May morning  
 Was not sae sweet as she.

This is from "The Gay Goss-Hawk." And here are two famous stanzas from "Waly, Waly," in another metre:

O waly, waly, but love be bonnie  
 A little time while it is new!  
 But when it is auld it waxeth cauld,  
 And fadeth away like the morning dew.

. . . . .

I leaned my back unto an aik,  
 I thocht it was a trusty tree,  
 But first it bowed and syne it brake—  
 Sae my true love did lichtly me.

One other example: a modern one this time from William Morris, with a refrain (in the frequent but irregular and, as it were, accidental use of this the ballad resembles the carol):

There was a lady lived in a hall,  
 Large of her eyes, and slim and tall;  
 And ever she sang from noon to noon  
*Two red roses across the moon.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Lost.



There was a knight came riding by  
In early spring, when the roads were dry,  
And he heard that lady sing at the noon :  
*Two red roses across the moon.*

The examples here cited, with Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* and Percy's *Reliques*<sup>1</sup> as principal text-books, may suffice for the student's first researches in ballad-lore. He should add, as contemporary examples of first-class excellence, Canon Langbridge's, recently gathered together and published under the title of *The Power of Red Michael and Other Ballads*.

<sup>1</sup> *The Ballad Book*, now included in most public libraries, will be another useful guide.

## XIV

### EPIGRAMMATIC VERSE—SOME FAMOUS EPIGRAMS

THE extreme point of brevity in English verse-forms is reached in the epigram, just as, in the old Provençal metres we have considered at length, the triolet attains that point. Epigrammatic verse is not, of course, a growth indigenous to English soil. How much earlier it flourished the Greek Anthology (to go back no further in the world-history of literature) will prove. But the Muse of our Parnassus has inspired some particularly fine and memorable examples, both grave and gay.

The satirical or humorous poet, and any other who had something to say which could best be said in a satirical or humorous manner, found the epigram a delightfully convenient vehicle. Here is a good description of this kind of epigrammatic verse :

An epigram should be, if right,  
Short, simple, pointed, keen and bright,  
A lively little thing ;  
Like wasp with taper body, bound  
By lines not many, neat and round,  
All ending in a sting !

“ Lines not many ” is the first point to note ;  
a lengthy epigram would be, obviously, a contra-

diction in terms. Yet the length is variable, within certain limits. One of Burns's most scathing satires is condensed to a couplet, in which the ignorant owner of a sumptuous library is pilloried for all time:

Free through the leaves, ye maggots, make your  
windings;  
But, for the owner's sake, O spare the bindings!

Swift's even better-known comparison of Handel's music with his now forgotten rival's, on the other hand, extends to six lines:

Some say, compared to Buononcini,  
Handel is nothing but a ninny.  
Others affirm that he, to Handel,  
Is scarcely fit to hold a candle.  
Strange that such difference should be  
'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The commonest epigrammatic stanza, however, is the quatrain. The following is a smart specimen of the political epigram, the name only being altered, for obvious reasons:

Great BLOWSON states to an admiring train  
That, if he died, the Empire would remain.  
Yes, if you die, it will survive you, BLOW;  
But if you live? That's what we want to know.<sup>1</sup>

The main features of the satirical epigram are point and flash; the weapon should sparkle where

<sup>1</sup> Here is another example written during the historic suffrage struggle now, happily, crowned with victory:

#### MEN AND WOMEN.

Stronger, men say, will life prove them:  
Concede it, dark and fair belles!  
The nightshade has a stronger stem  
Than harebells.

it strikes. In the hands of an accomplished master of the form it may be a potent weapon against social abuses or intellectual fallacies, a veritable rapier in the sharp cut-and-thrust of polemical warfare. It is then capable of useful and excellent work, which, perhaps, could be done in no other way so effectively. Mr Squire has shown this recently in some of his most polished and pointed satires against war-time abuses and fallacies. So wielded and directed, this jewelled stiletto from the Muse's armoury strikes more surely, pierces more deeply, than any bludgeon or cannon-ball of prose.

But the epigram has loftier uses even than this. It is often a work of art, a revelation of beauty, and even of the highest and deepest forms of truth. Very often the purely poetical epigram, like the political, has a spice of satire, a sub-acid pungency of flavour, as in the two fine specimens quoted below. In the first, Coventry Patmore replied to the critics who attacked his later love-poetry as "too transcendental." The second is Sir William Watson's, and may be left to explain itself :

A bee upon a wild-rose hung,  
And wild with pleasure sucked and kissed.  
A flesh-fly listening, snout in dung,  
Sneered "What a Transcendentalist !"

---

A deft musician does the breeze become  
Whenever an Æolian harp it finds.  
Hornpipe and hurdy-gurdy both are dumb  
Unto the most musicianly of winds.

---

For summarising ethical or spiritual rules in rememberable form—rules of life and conduct—

the epigram has few equals. It focusses the white light of truth as in a prism of cut crystal ; concentrates it, clarifies it, till the truth not only shines but burns. This lovely quatrain by Mary E. Christie shows such an illumination of moral law, vivid as if the crystal were a burning-glass :

Many a king here wanders in disguise,  
And, with a realm at heart, a cake must turn.  
But—art thou Alfreð? Never let it burn.  
Show, in a kitchen, thou hast royal eyes.

So with this by Canon Langbridge, illustrating a still higher law of life :

God metes not out our life in one long length,  
But in a tenderer and wiser way.  
Have faith, and take thy bread, thy cross, thy strength,  
Day by day.

The epigrams of Sir William Watson, Canon Langbridge, and the late Thomas Bailey Aldrich (to the present writer's thinking decidedly the finest of America's recent poets) rank with the best examples of this kind of verse. Some of the finest of these quatrains are miracles of crystallisation, and are remarkable for dignity of thought as for clarity of expression. It is thought sifted and winnowed to its last refinement, expression at its high-water mark of felicity in simplicity ; *multum in parvo* ; "purity in quintessence, one dewdrop." Such lofty themes as "Grace and Strength" ; the different vision which can elect to see, from the same grated window, either the mud or the stars ; the tragedy of *King Lear*, and the doom of Keats, are treated by these three poets within the narrowest limits ; treated, in nearly every case, completely as concisely, and with apparently effortless ease.

Brevity illuminated with beauty should mark the epigram of art, Nature, or religion. For the polemical or satirical epigram it is enough that it should be, simultaneously, a falchion of wit and a hammer to hit the right nail on the head and drive it home; two weapons, therefore, in one.

## XV

### PUNCTUATION AND PAUSING—THE CÆSURAL PAUSE

PUNCTUATION is to poetry precisely what “rests” are to music, what breathing-spaces are to a singer, or the ground between the flower-beds to a gardener. As the flowers would run riot, would lose order and effectiveness without the intervening stretches of grass or gravel, so would the words, or notes, without an intermediate pause. In the case of written words, whether of poetry or prose, both the duration of this pause and its relation to what follows are indicated by a punctuation-mark: colon, semicolon, comma, or full stop; dash or diæresis, question-mark or note of exclamation. Elementary students are always asking where, and why, each of these should be employed; so a few hints on the subject, though unnecessary for verse-writers of a more advanced grade, may not be out of place.

The best way to find out how verse should be punctuated, then, is to *speak* it; to write it as you would say it. If you were not writing, but talking, your voice would echo—and so must your verse—the natural pauses and inflections of your thought. If you were exclaiming, “Niagara, what a wonder, what a joy!” you would certainly make a slight, though barely perceptible, pause after addressing



the Falls by name, and between the expression of your wonder and of your joy. Hence the commas in this sentence ; while its final exclamation-point marks your admiration, your emotion.

But suppose you wanted to express the terror as well as the splendour of Niagara, its power to destroy as well as to delight. Probably you would then make a slightly longer pause to divide the two halves of your thought ; the separated, and yet related, clauses of your sentence. To indicate this division you would employ, in writing, a semicolon, thus :

Niagara, what a wonder, what a joy !  
Thou dost delight men ; yet thou dost destroy.

When the thought or any phase of it is complete the sentence is too, and the period, or full stop, marks its completion.

The use of the colon is much less commonly understood than that of the other punctuation-marks. It introduces, without a conjunction as connecting-link, something related to or arising out of the previous sentence, thus :

Art is the artist's Mecca of delight :  
The desert he will cross to bring that goal in sight.

Had the conjunction "for" or "and" been used to introduce the second half of the sentence, a comma would have served instead of a colon. This latter mark serves to show, then, the relation of the two clauses of a complex sentence without an intermediate conjunction. It is also used to introduce a quotation.

Pausing can shape the poem as phrasing can the music ; can give it balance, cadence, and significance. It arranges words into groups, delicately

divided and yet related by a connecting thread of thought.

Here is a nobly paused passage from one of Wordsworth's great sonnets, that addressed to Toussaint :

Thou hast left behind  
Powers that will work for thee : air, earth, and skies :  
There's not a breathing of the common wind  
That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies :  
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

Even more subtly harmonious in pause and poise is this sonnet of Shakespeare's, the incomparable No. XC. :

Then leave me, if thou wilt ; if ever, now,  
Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross.  
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,  
And do not drop in for an after loss :  
Ah, do not, when my heart has 'scaped this sorrow,  
Come in the rearward of a conquered woe :  
Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,  
To linger out a purposed overthrow.  
If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,  
When other petty griefs have done their spite,  
But in the onset come : so shall I taste  
At first the very worst of fortune's might.  
And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,  
Compared with loss of thee will not seem so.

Observe how the "rests" embellish the music here ! The reiteration in line 1, with the dividing semicolon—the colon breaking up line 11 as with the break of a pleading voice when a sob interrupts the plea,—are masterpieces of phrasing and pausing ; the whole sonnet being, indeed, a superb example of this phase of poetic

art. Nothing could more effectually demonstrate what the structure of poetry owes to punctuation, the framework holding it together.

Very young students may look for a word on the uses of the dash and the diæresis. The first is used not only as a variant for the parenthesis or "brackets"—employed, as here, to indicate an interpolated thought,—but to mark an abrupt break, a pause, in reflection or dialogue. Thus:

To be, or not to be,—that is the question.

The diæresis, written thus . . . , has a similar use, but often indicates a longer pause, a complete breaking off of the thread of thought before the intrusion of a new idea; or, in dialogue, of an interruption, either from the person addressed or from a new arrival on the scene. It also marks an ellipsis, an hiatus; the substitution for speech, where all speech is felt to be inadequate, of a more significant silence. Thus:

If I could tell thee all thou art to me . . .

The cæsural pause is a stumbling-block to many beginners. The tyro in versification, attempting any verse-form introducing alexandrine lines (the Spenserian stanza, for example), is pretty sure to slur it over. To ignore the natural midway division of the line—the "half-way house" which breaks it up into two equal parts of six syllables, precisely as a bar of music breaks up the various groups of notes into orderly sequences—is an audacity which only skilled artists should permit themselves, as in the line where Keats lets us see, before the blighting and withering touch of cold philosophy,

The tender-personed Lamia melt into a shade.

Here, indeed, the melting away of the cæsural pause, the confused blending and running into each other of the syllables, harmonises perfectly with the thought and scene. But no such effect is secured, or even aimed at, by the youthful student's halting alexandrines. His verse simply fails to pause on the right note. To indicate that note so that the voice shall halt on it naturally, though with a pause barely perceptible, is the true function of the cæsura.

Nuttall's definition of the term is "a pause in verse, so introduced as to aid the recital and render the versification more melodious. In Latin verse, the separation of the last syllable of any word from those which precede it, and the carrying it forward into another foot" (precisely as Keats carried the last syllable of "Lamia"; a practice, however, by no means to be recommended in English verse, to artists of less consummate skill). "It always renders the syllable on which it falls long, and is accompanied with a slight pause, called the cæsural pause."

Now a "long" syllable, as we have seen, is in our language an accented one; so we must watch our accents if we would mark our cæsuræ correctly. In the alexandrine line this point is specially important. Many French poems and not a few famous English ones, like Browning's "Ivàn Ivànovitch" and "Fifine at the Fair," are written in alexandrines throughout. But the line occurs most commonly in odes and (as we have just remarked) poems in Spenserian stanza; also as an occasional variant of the heroic couplet, especially in narrative or dramatic verse. The importance of this division of the final line into two equal parts is particularly to be insisted on in Spenser's metre. Imagine, for instance, the ruin which would be wrought

in one of the lovely "Adonais" alexandrines if it read—

And the wild winds flew sobbing round in their  
dismay,

instead of reading, as now,

And the wild winds flew round, sobbing in their  
dismay.

The transposition or obliteration of the cæsural pause can always, in unpractised hands, work similar havoc. This is the natural division of a perfect alexandrine—in this case also a line of perfect poetry,—the cæsural pause being indicated by the double line :

Fear wist | not to | evade || as love | wist to | pursue.<sup>1</sup>

So in other metres. The pause occurs in the place where the voice halts naturally. In this metre (Kipling's in "The First Chantey," as echoed by an imitator) it occurs at the seventh syllable :

Dear to the | bud is the | beam, || piercing its | cover;—  
Yet, to the | heart's loving | dream, || dearer the | lover.

The student's ear must be his guide in the simpler and commoner metres. These hints may serve, however, as an introduction to the use and place and meaning of cæsuræ, and of pausing and phrasing in general.

<sup>1</sup> From *The Hound of Heaven*.

## XVI

### SIMILE AND METAPHOR— ALLITERATION

A TRULY illustrative simile is to the poet's thought what a lamp is to a dark corner ; a revealer, an illuminator, showing what was hidden and making clear what was obscure. It is also what well-wrought embroidery is to a fine-spun garment ; what Chopin's fringe of grace-notes is to the main fabric of his music ; an embellishment making beauty itself more beautiful. It is, as the word itself indicates, a bringing together of similitudes ; a comparison of one thing with another, picturing like by like. Here is a cluster of lovely similes ; each, like a sunbeam, at once clarifying and beautifying the idea it illustrates or the fact it adorns with fancy :

Long may the spring,  
Quietly as a sleeping infant's breath,  
Send up cold waters to the traveller  
With soft and even pulse !

COLERIDGE.

And as a little simple, innocent bird,  
That has but one plain passage of few notes,  
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
For all an April morning, till the ear  
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid  
Went in herself repeating "Must I die?"

TENNYSON.

With no stain  
 She faded, like a cloud which had outwept its rain.  
SHELLEY.

There Sweetness out of Sadness breaks at fits,  
 Like bubbles on dark water, or as flits  
 A sudden silver fin through its deep infinites.  
FRANCIS THOMPSON.

As the innocent moon, which nothing does but shine,  
 Moves all the labouring surges of the world.  
FRANCIS THOMPSON.

Each of these similitudes is a pearl of poetry, and, no less, of imagery. So is this in the lovely idyll of "Lancelot and Elaine";<sup>1</sup> where, also, it serves indirectly the high uses of Urania by bringing a lamp to the Valley of the Shadow:

Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field,  
 Approaching through the darkness.

And this, likening the fading and changing voice of Gawain's ghost, in "The Passing of Arthur," to

Wild birds that change  
 Their season in the night, and wail their way  
 From cloud to cloud.

For a final example we may take that noble passage of the "Adonais" describing the flight of Urania over the road rough with steel and stones and human hearts, which

Rent the soft Form they never could repel,  
 Whose sacred blood, like the young tears of May,  
 Paved with eternal flowers that undeserving way.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from, also, in the "bird and maid" simile just cited.



The simile links two similar things by the word "like" or "as." The metaphor omits that outward sign of similitude, while still comparing like with like. Fact and symbol, the thing and its image, are brought together without the connecting word which, in the simile, shows their relationship. "Much have I travelled in the realms of gold": that is a metaphor. "Like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes He stared at the Pacific": that is a simile. As Mr Chesterton has quaintly said, when we use a metaphor we say what a thing is by saying what it is not. "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang"—what better metaphor for the winter woods? "Stormy miry depths aloft are hurled"—Christina Rossetti's poetical transcription from *Holy Writ*—describes by as graphic a metaphor the unrest of the wicked. And what a string of similes—a veritable string of pearls—she gives us to describe the adamant purity of Lizzie in "Goblin Market!"

Many readers will recall Mrs Meynell's noble poem "The Courts," where the "loaded poets," whose style is encrusted with gems of simile and metaphor, find at last the "ultimate poetry" of pure, bare statement; too great, too simple in its greatness, to need the pomp of illustrative imagery. These poets, attaining this last shrine and Holy of Holies of poetic art, are "the Kings that found a Child"—that line itself, it may be noted, being a magnificent metaphor. So is this distich by the same poet:

A verse of bells takes wing  
And flies with the cloud.

---

"Alliteration's artful aid" is by no means to be despised or ignored, but should never be overdone. The device of beginning two or more words

with the same letter, seen in the earliest examples of Anglo-Saxon poetry, is frequently used by modern poets. Swinburne is, of course, the doughtiest wielder of this poetic tool, and has often been accused—not unjustly in some instances—of showing off his skill in the use of it too constantly. Alliteration being an ornament, to overdo it is a foppery or an extravagance ; sometimes both. It can scarcely be called overdone, however, in such a passage as this ; a typical example :

O the grief, O the grace,  
As of day when it dies !  
Who is this bending over thee, lord, with tears and  
suppression of sighs ?<sup>1</sup>

But this, from Tennyson, is still finer. Even that accomplished artist has given us few lines, if any, more purely artistic or more nobly beautiful. And the alliteration, like the subtle management of the vowels and liquid consonants, enhances the beauty and the music :

And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.<sup>2</sup>

Compare the delicious smoothness of that with the deliberate and intentional harshness of this :

Clang battle-axe and clash brand ! Let the King reign.<sup>3</sup>

These lines from the first and last of the "Idylls" are perfect specimens of onomatopœia, using the word in its modern significance (the art of representing the sense by the sound). The first passage cited is also a perfect specimen of allitera-

<sup>1</sup> From "Atalanta in Calydon." By A. C. Swinburne. (London, Heinemann.)

<sup>2</sup> From "The Passing of Arthur."

<sup>3</sup> From "The Coming of Arthur."

tion skilfully, faultlessly employed. In the use of this embellishment the student must exercise a judicious economy, or he may achieve results provoking comparison with the old tongue-twister, "Around the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran!" Words beginning with the same letter should, as a rule, be divided by several intervening words, where more than two are employed. This is the safest rule for the use, without abuse, of alliteration.

## XVII

### METRES FOR BEGINNERS — SOME MUSICAL METRES — TERZA RIMA —RHYME-ROYAL

ONE principal reason why so many beginners fail to make their lines "scan" lies in their ambitious choice of a metre. Long, unwieldy measures with any number of syllables to be "puckered in," or elastic ones which tempt the unwary to "pucker in" too many, are chosen, irrespective of their difficulties; or, it may be, an elaborate and complicated stanza like that of Keats's odes, or of Matthew Arnold's "Scholar-Gipsy" and "Thyrsis." In any case, the measure and stanza attempted are hopelessly beyond the beginner's powers.

Double common-metre, in which so many excellent hymns are written; or common-metre, if the fatal fluency of the young writer of promise can confine itself to quatrains instead of expanding into octaves; or long-metre, abundant as the two others in noble hymn-models (*bad* hymns, which, alas! are plentiful in all hymnals, must be rigorously avoided), may all furnish wings for an early flight. Choose the great examples: "Our God, our help in ages past," "At even, ere the sun was set," and "I heard the voice of Jesus say." The trochaic seven-syllabled line of the incomparable "Jesus, Lover of my soul" may also be attempted;

not in hymns, however, no form of composition being more difficult or more exacting. Short-metre I do not recommend, because of its lack of essential beauty and dignity; a deficiency curiously attested by the fact that, except Montgomery's "A few more years shall roll" and one or two others from the same pen, it yields scarcely any examples of first-class rank as poetry.

The metrical index of a standard tune-book, such as the *Bristol* or *Church Hymns*, will be found by the elementary student an excellent poetic primer. Great care must be taken, however, to avoid sing-song effects; "that dreadful tum-ti-tum" of which one irritated editor complained to the present writer, as being a too frequent characteristic of the amateur's attempts. "Echoes of the worst of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*," sighed another editor of my acquaintance over certain jog-trot jingles in common-metre, of the kind that is only too common; or in long-metre where the "deadly regularity" of the iambic foot goes up and down, up and down, like a see-saw. Care, and study of the best examples, must teach you how to avoid these distressing effects. Pick out all the L.M., C.M., or D.C.M. lyrics in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*—Clough's "Qua Cursum Ventus," Sir Henry Wotton's lyric of the happy life, Scott's "County Guy,"—do *they* amble along with such a recurrent trot as hits the ear? The device of slurred syllables, referred to in a previous chapter, will help to carry your thought along musically till it gains strength to move, as all poetic thought should move, by the wind of its own wings.

A simple but very effective metre, particularly advisable for students inexperienced in versification but with a good ear for verse-music, is 8.8.8.6 iambic, with alternate rhymes.

Will no one tell me what she sings?  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
From old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago.<sup>1</sup>

Is not the music, here, as noble as the metre is simple? The most intricately involved harmony could not achieve a finer effect.

So far we have been considering the metrical needs of the elementary student only; but the study of metre and the choice of a suitable metrical medium are of equal importance to the most advanced. There is just one thing lacking in much good verse—*good* verse, be it noted; neat, accomplished work, vigorous in idea and graceful in expression—which comes into my hands. It is a thing intangible as air, and to poetry as indispensable, for the Muse finds in it her very breath of life. This is the subtle alchemy of the “song-smith” whose art transmutes words into music; whose verses need not be set or sung, because they sing themselves. How to learn the secret of this alchemy is what baffles, often, even the accomplished versifier with an ear and an instinct for verse. Many an earnest student and true lover of poetry will echo the despairing cry of one of my own pupils: “There is something in the prize poems you give on your page, and in other poems I read, that I miss in my own work. I believe it is the spirit of poetry. My verses seem like the dry bones, without life in them.”

This was a shrewd and sound bit of self-criticism, and applies to many painstaking workers. Now, how is that breath of life—the singing breath—to be got into the dead matter of mere “words, words, words”? Inspiration, the wind

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's “Solitary Reaper.”

above all things incalculable and uncontrollable, is certainly not at our bidding. But we may at least open our windows to the wind in the direction whence it is most likely to blow; we may even find it possible to induce, certainly to invite, the right atmospheric conditions. And I have found no better way of doing this than by reading a poem written, by a master hand, in a musical metre. Genius can make music of any, as we have seen; but it is the metre inherently musical which is most likely to awake its own echo; *not* its repetition, but a thing born of it which has still a separate existence, alike and yet unlike. The harmony enters into the listener's soul and interpenetrates his thought; any lyrical idea he may have at the time runs to the rhyme of it, keeps step to the tune of it; wears naturally, at last, the same vesture; partakes of the same essence, it may be, for thought and expression are as mysteriously allied as spirit and flesh.

The choice of a metre is thus seen to be of vital importance. How to choose one is the next thing; though poetry, as distinct from verse, usually dictates its own and insists on that and no other. But this is a book for students; and these, at least in their earlier efforts, need guidance in matters which may and should regulate themselves later. The first necessity, then, is to see that the metre, the medium of expression, fits the thought to be expressed; for, as Pope points out in the *Essay on Criticism*,

Expression is the dress of thought, and still  
Appears more decent as more suitable;

For different styles with different subjects sort,  
As several garbs with country, town, and court.



As we observed in considering the old French forms, a light, gay fancy that should trip to a tune like the "March of the Elves" in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* would become merely ridiculous in moving to the slow and stately strains of the Dead March in "Saul." Such exceptions to the rule as Christina Rossetti's roundels (exceptions, that is, to the contrary rule of stately measures for lofty thoughts) must by no means embolden the beginner to attempt a similar feat. A pupil once wisely remarked to me, in citing the missing rhyme in *Lycidas* as a justification for a similar slip, "But then, I am not Milton." The beauty extracted from incongruity by master hands will hardly yield up its secret to the unpractised.

*Allegro* tunes, then, must not be fitted to *adagio* measures, or *vice versa*. There are musical metres to fit all thoughts, and it is the poet's business to find them. One of equal beauty and difficulty, and of that provocative charm which tempts to experiment, is Meredith's "Love in the Valley" metre. Here is one experiment in it ; the glorious original, that "Song of Songs, which is Meredith's,"<sup>1</sup> being too well known to make quotation advisable :

Fair wakes the world in the golden dawn of April,  
 Flushed with happy dreams to the young heart's core,  
 Fresh, like her larks, from a dew-bath in the daisies,  
 Wintry woes behind her, and her bliss before.  
 Fair, how fair ! with a grace 'twixt tears and laughter,  
 Tears of tender rain hid in violet eyes,  
 Laughter of Lent lilies in hair the wet wind tangles,  
 Earth breathes out her love in the year's sunrise.

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<sup>1</sup> So called by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. See his *Studies in Literature*.

Perfect stands the world in the full June daylight,  
Glowing like a bride robed to meet her bridal hour.  
Low, warm winds bear the breathing of the roses ;  
Doves croon and coo from their hidden blissful bower.  
Soft, how soft ! comes the sighing of the summer  
Over thymy ways where the brown bees hide,  
While with light and music, with joy of woods and waters,  
Earth and sun are wed at the year's noontide.

Merry goes the world in the rich September twilight,  
Russet leaves and red round her matron brows.  
Glad with gold of harvests and ruddy glee of orchards,  
With her happy burden the rosy Mother bows.  
Soon, how soon, come the signs of age and winter—  
Last leaves falling on the wood-paths wet.  
Yet to-day with gladness, with shout and song of reapers,  
Earth beholds her fruit in the year's sunset.

Cold lies the world in the darkness of December,  
Grey with duties done to the hushed heart's core,  
Wrapped in leaden clouds from the kisses of the sunshine ;  
All her joys behind her, and a sleep before.  
Still, how still ! while her forest-lands forsaken  
Stretch their empty arms to her shroud's chill white,  
Mute as her nests are, and faded like her roses,  
Earth is lying dead in the year's midnight.

The difficulty of this metre lies in its elasticity, its charming irregularity and variety. Many syllables go to one foot, few to another ; yet the metre is essentially one. How to make the ever-changing movement harmonious, congruous—obedient to its own law while preserving its own capricious charm—is the student's problem, and a fascinating one.

In skilled hands the Spenserian stanza is equally musical. We have already noted, and quoted, the late Professor Saintsbury's praise of it. It has the undulant music of the Spenserian sonnet ; a rhyme-

scheme singularly effective, and clinched with the final alexandrine which adds so much to its beauty and dignity. Some lovely examples from Shelley's "Adonais" were given in an earlier chapter. Here are two of Spenser's own loveliest; verses which fall with the drip of honey-dew:

The joyous birds, shrouded in cheerful shade,  
 Their notes unto the voice attemperèd sweet;  
 The angelical soft trembling voices made  
 To the instruments divine respondance meet;  
 The silver sounding instruments did greet  
 The low bass murmur of the water's fall;  
 The water's fall with difference discreet,  
 Now loud, now soft, unto the wind did call;  
 The gentle warbling wind low answerèd to all.

The whiles someone did chaunt this lovely lay:  
 "Ah, see, whoso fair thing art fain to see,  
 In springing flower the image of thy day!  
 Ah, see the virgin rose, how sweetly she  
 Doth first peep forth in bashful modesty,  
 That fairer seems the less ye see her may!  
 Lo, see soon after how more bold and free  
 Her barèd bosom she doth broad display!  
 Lo, see soon after how she fades and falls away!"

Burns's metre (8.8.8.4.8.4 iambic) is at once simple and musical, and may best be studied in the "Mouse" and "Mountain Daisy" examples. Here is a charming stanza from the latter:

Alas! it's no thy neebor sweet,  
 The bonnie Lark, companion meet,  
 Bending thee 'mang the dewy weet  
     Wi' speckled breist,  
 When upward-springing, blithe, to greet  
     The purpling east.

Christina Rossetti's use of an easy but effective verse-form already considered (8.8.8.6 iambic), in "The Lowest Room," should also be studied; and Mrs Browning's, in "The Deserted Garden," is equally noteworthy, especially because of her variant of the usual rhyme-scheme. And one of the most musical metres I know, of the uncomplex, unelaborate kind which alone may be recommended to young versifiers, is Grant Allen's variant of the famous Omar Khayyám stanza:

The lily nestling fairest in the glade  
Is earliest plucked, and lightly left to fade;  
The deepest blushing rose is soonest gathered;  
The truest trusting maiden first betrayed.

What sin has blighted thee, what monstrous crime  
Has poisoned thy young years for endless time?  
The sin of love, the crime of trustful beauty,  
The guileless innocence of thy maiden prime.

Have not your hearts leapt up when o'er the wave  
Echoed the faint cry of some hapless slave?  
But here, to-day, our sister and our daughter  
Sinks at our door, and none will hear or save.

The stanza, it will be seen, is Omar's own but for one slight difference; slight but important. That lilt and lift of the breaking wave before it falls, which Fitzgerald observed in the third line of the original Rubaiyát metre, are increased in effectiveness by the double or "feminine" terminal of the same line here. The unrhymed line is, of course, the distinctive glory of the stanza.

Still another musical metre, though one on which it is not advisable to lay rash or presumptuous hands, is *terza rima*, the Italian triplet

of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Longfellow's translation preserves the original structure. The line is iambic and decasyllabic, except where a "feminine" rhyme lengthens it by a syllable. The first and third lines rhyme, the middle line of each triplet rhyming with the first and third of the next. A final couplet is added to rhyme the last "middle," at the close of a short poem and of each section of a longer one. The closing section of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" is a superb example (Shelley, in this poem and the fragment, "The Triumph of Life," consecrated the metre to beauty in English as Dante did in Italian):

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is!  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
 Like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth!  
 And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
 Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Carlyle thinks that the *Divina Commedia* owes much of its music to its metre—"the simple *terza rima*" where "one reads along naturally with a sort of lilt." "In the very sound of it"

(the poem) "there is a *canto fermo* ; it proceeds as by a chant," he says.<sup>1</sup>

Rhyme-royal deserves more attention than it has received from most modern poets. Its name is, as most students will know, derived from its use by King James I. of Scotland in the *King's Quair* of 1423. The *a b a b b c c* rhyme-scheme of the decasyllabic lines has a curiously musical effect in skilled hands. Chaucer's "Clerk of Oxford's Tale" (the famous story of Patient Griselda) is probably the best known of the classic examples of this metre : better known even than his "Troilus and Criseyde," "The Parliament of Fowls," the delightful legend of St Cecilia in the "Second Nun's Tale," or the story of Constance ("Man of Law's Tale"). Two stanzas from the "Griselda" story will show both its structure and its charm. The English is modernised as far as possible.

But though this mayden tender were of age,  
 Yet in the breast of her virginity  
 There was enclosed ripe and sad courage,  
 And in great reverence and charity  
 Her oldë poorë father fostered she.  
 A few sheep, spinning, on a field she kept.  
 She woldë not be idle till she slept.

. . . . .

Now when this Walter saw her patiëce,  
 Her gladë cheer, and no malice at all,  
 And he so oft had done to her offence,  
 And she aye sad <sup>2</sup> and constant as a wall,  
 Continuing ever her innocence over all,  
 This sturdy marquis 'gan his hertë dresse  
 To rewen upon her wifely steadfastness.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Heroes and Hero-Worship* ("The Hero as Poet").

<sup>2</sup> Steadfast.

Rhyme-royal was written later in an eight-line stanza. James I. of England (we have learnt from Mr Murray's erudition and research) had an additional *b* line sandwiched between the two in *c*. But Chaucer's seven-line stanza is, I think, by far the more effective of the two rhyme-schemes ; and it lends its own charm, as we have seen, to some of the best and best-known of the *Canterbury Tales*.



## XVIII

### THE USES OF RHYME—TRIPLE OR DACTYL RHYMES—INTERNAL RHYMES—THE PERFECT ASSON- ANCE — A FRENCH POET ON RHYME

SOME of the uses of rhyme have been noted in the chapter devoted to blank verse ; chiefly its value as a restriction on the natural expansiveness of the beginner and a prop to his often halting thought. But rhyme is much more than a crutch for cripples or a leading-string for toddlers. The greatest master, no less than the humblest student, may welcome its aid. That "double-clappered silver bell" adds witchery to all music ; the verse which is "ruled by returning kiss of rhymes," in Coventry Patmore's phrase, is all the sweeter for the kiss. What Wordsworth says of the source of the pleasure given by metrical composition in general—the pleasure given both to ear and mind by language at once like and unlike to that of every day—is particularly true of rhyme ; in spite of the poet's opposite conclusion when he wrote "The Excursion" and "The Prelude." In that defence of *metre*, indeed, he hit on the very secret of the fascination of rhyme. "Like, and yet unlike" the speech we hear around us, it is to that speech as the woman to the man (to borrow and expand Wordsworth's

own simile). The words we all know ; but the rhymes give them an essential, an enchanting difference. More than metre, because their appeal to the ear is more direct and instant, they add to the matter of a poem—to the thought, the feeling, which are its raw elements—Poetry's combining and transmuting touch, by which the rock becomes a crystal and the dust gold. You cannot imagine the *Intimations of Immortality* without rhymes ; nor the *In Memoriam*. Nor *Paradise Lost* with them, it may be objected. But while blank-verse masterpieces of such sustained majesty as Milton's are rare in any language, rhyme can point to multitudes in all the world's great languages now spoken. This fact in itself may go far to prove our contention that rhyme is the poet's best friend.

For Pegasus, even to his most skilled and practised riders, is a fiery and a heady steed. Verlaine knew that when he advised the bearing-rein of poetic restraint as a check on his most daring flights, in that debatable land where the borders of poetry and rhetoric meet :

Take Eloquence by the throat ! rein hard,  
Curb well, thy steed of song !  
Curb him and watch him well, Sir Bard,  
Else wild his flight and long !

Rhyme imposes that salutary check on the poet's thought ; and by no means on the minor poet's only.

Nor is this rhyme's sole use and function ; nor is all its use ornament, though as such its services are beyond price. "The delicate *clasping* of the thoughts together" was held by the late Richard Holt Hutton to be its chief office ; and often it happens that, lacking the clasp, the pearls are spilt. Memory is particularly prone to spill them ; rhyme

is a remembrancer above every other in value. This is one of its uses to the reader, the "silent lover," of poetry. But the poet himself links up his thoughts more easily, fastens them more securely, and arranges them in a seemlier, comelier order, with the help of that clasp of gold. But it must be of gold, pure gold, always. No mere terminal tags, fastening Brummagem ware with tinsel, will serve. Rhyme is discredited in our day partly because of the base uses it has been made to serve, and the cheap counterfeit offered in its place, by ignorant or slovenly versifiers.

Yet to say that we are sick of a meretricious jingle and tinkle is not to say that music has outlived its use. Let no student discard, for a whim or a passing fad, what enriches the music of the masters. Let him rather learn from them how rhyme may aid movement and melody; how it may avoid the "tag" effect of crudely obvious assonances; how richly it may be varied and how fitly used.

There is one class of rhymes which Browning used with superb audacity, and often with consummate skill; though he was not seldom tempted to overdo the effect in such couplets as the famous, or notorious,

You trample our beds of ranunculus,  
While you "Tommy-make-room-for-your-uncle" us.

The triple or dactyl rhyme, of which this is an example, may certainly "add another string to the lyre of Terpander"; which Mrs Browning's daring rhyme-innovations as certainly failed to do. These, indeed, are really not rhymes at all, but only half-asonances, matching consonants without vowels or *vicé versa* (as in the dreadful "angels-candles" example which flaws, with many

others, the noble poetry of "The Dead Pan"). Single rhymes tend to wax monotonous in a long poem ; double ones, exclusive of those ending in "ing," are not too plentiful in English ; the triple or tri-syllabic are a welcome addition. "The Flight of the Duchess" and "Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha" are particularly rich in such rhymes ; so is "Christmas Eve." So, too, is Hood's masterpiece, the "Bridge of Sighs" :

Make no deep *scrutiny*  
 Into her *mutiny*  
     Rash and *undutiful*.  
 Past all dishonour,  
 Death has left on her  
     Only the *beautiful*.

O, it was *pitiful*!  
 Near a whole *city-full*  
     Home she had none.

These dactyl rhymes, it will be observed, must be accented on the first of the three syllables, the two last being *absolutely identical* in sound. *Charity—chastity* cannot be said to rhyme ; *charity—clarity* is a perfect assonance, the last two syllables of each word being identical and the first different but harmonious. Triple or dactyl rhymes are most effective in alternation with double or single, as in Hood's example given above.

Another useful variant of the ordinary terminal assonance will be found in internal rhymes. Browning's "Dis Aliter Visum" is a remarkable example of this kind of rhyming consistently sustained through a poem of thirty stanzas. With the usual rhymes at the end of the lines, the second of each verse contains an internal assonance, thus :

Schumann's our music-maker now :  
 Has his march-movement youth and mouth ?  
 Ingres's the modern man that paints :  
 Which will lean on me, of his saints ?  
 Heine for songs : for kisses, how ?

All for a nosegay !—what came first ;  
 With fields of flowers, untried each side ;  
 I rally, need my books and men,  
 And find a nosegay ; drop it, then,  
 No match yet made for best or worst !

That ended me. You judged the porch  
 We left by, Norman ; took our look  
 At sea and sky ; wondered so few  
 Found out the place, for air and view ;  
 Remarked the sun began to scorch.

“Youth and mouth,” “untried each side,”  
 “took our look” : this is internal rhyming at its  
 simplest. Here is a much more elaborate  
 example :

Paint may acquaint us with ladies less wonderful :  
 Say if it may with my Lady, their queen !  
 Looks like clear brooks, or as clouds that are thunderful ;  
 Moods where Night broods or the sun sits serene.  
 Eye—what can vie with the blue, with the dew in it ?  
 Cheek that can speak with the tongue of the rose ;  
 Face with the grace of the Spring ever new in it,  
 Yet a Spring set in impregnable snows ;  
 Lips that Love sips—could a bee on such honey light !  
 Hair floating fair—hoards a miser such pelf ?  
 Brow bound and crowned, like a saint's, with its sunny  
 light—  
 Limn I, yet dim I, her praise and herself.  
 O, could I show but the heart and the soul of her !  
 Then should my pen with the nest give the dove ;  
 Bower and flower—the core and the whole of her,  
 Bright with the light of her, sweet with the love !

Words rhyming to the eye but not to the ear, like Browning's "youth" and "mouth," are always permissible; are, indeed, necessary in a language so comparatively poor in complete assonances as ours. This licence must not, however, be carried too far, as in the case of the writer (a very clever writer, too) who deliberately and of *malice prepense* rhymed "stone" with "anemone"! The perfect assonance is one which not only rhymes to eye and ear alike, but avoids the obvious, the banal; which satisfies by its completeness and surprises by its fitness. The two questions of what rhyme can be at its best and why it should be at all were never more fully and beautifully answered than by Sainte-Beuve in his charming poem "À la Rime," of which I quote a few verses:

Rime, qui donnes leurs sons  
 Aux chansons;  
 Rime, l'unique harmonie  
 Du vers, qui, sans tes accents  
 Frémissements,  
 Serait muet au génie;

Rime, écho qui prends la voix  
 Du hautbois  
 Ou l'éclat de la trompette;  
 Dernier adieu d'un ami  
 Qu'à demi  
 L'autre ami de loin répète;

Rime, tranchant aviron,  
 Eperon  
 Qui fends la vague écumante;  
 Frein d'or, aiguillon d'acier  
 Du coursier  
 A la crinière fumante;

Clef, qui loin de l'œil mortel,  
 Sur l'autel  
 Ouvres l'arche du miracle ;  
 Ou tiens le vase embaumé  
 Renfermé  
 Dans le cèdre au tabernacle ;

Ah ! plutôt, fée au léger  
 Voltiger,  
 Habile, agile courrière,  
 Qui mènes le char des vers  
 Dans les airs  
 Par deux sillons de lumière ;

O Rime ! qui que tu sois,  
 Je reçois  
 Ton joug ; et longtemps rebelle,  
 Corrigé, je te promets  
 Désormais  
 Une oreille plus fidèle.

Without that "golden rein," that "spur of steel," Pegasus, as we have seen and as many poets have proved, is "gey ill to manage." And rhyme, as Sainte-Beuve knew, provides both together ; the stimulus when thought lags, the check when it runs headlong.



## XIX

### ODES, LYRIC AND PINDARIC

THE ode has two forms: one which may be written in any lyric metre; one in verse irregularly rhymed and in lines of varying length, after the manner of Pindar—hence called *Pindaric*. The latter, often called “ode metre,” is the truer, more distinctive form; but many of the finest odes in the language—Shelley’s “Skylark,” for instance—are written in lyric measures regularly divided into stanzas of equal length. Francis Thompson’s “Ode to the Setting Sun,” considered apart from the decasyllabic quatrains of its introduction and conclusion, is a superb modern example of the Pindaric ode. So is the second half of his “Sister Songs” (the first diverges into lyrical bypaths, and eddies, here and there, into a “dance of words”); so, too, is Sir William Watson’s characteristically dignified and beautiful “Ode on the Coronation of Edward the Seventh.”

In all odes, lyric or Pindaric, one primary condition must be observed. Things or persons must be *apostrophised*; not written *about*, but written *to*; addressed as if actually present, audient, visible, as they should in fact be to the poet’s imagination. The ode’s true reason for existence is that exalted mood, that intensity of emotional activity, which conjures up before the mental eye things unseen

by the physical ; gives life to dead matter and sentience to the insentient ; makes, in a word, the things that are not as if they were. This is the "fine frenzy" of which Shakespeare wrote, the mood of which alone the true ode is born, and the absence of which, in odes produced without warrant of inspiration, is responsible for those "cold wire-drawn odes" Mrs Browning made Aurora Leigh smile and sigh over in recalling her youthful efforts. True, Aurora's "cold, wire-drawn" work had the authentic "white heats" behind it ; she lacked only maturity of expression, not sincerity of inspiration. Young writers cannot always hope to achieve the first ; without the last let them attempt anything rather than an ode.

For this form is no mere affair of strophe, antistrophe, and epode ; of a longer verse followed by a shorter and wound up, as in the Greek examples written to be sung, with a lyrical, more or less musical *finale*. These are the dry bones, the skeleton framework only ; incidentals with which poets of Wordsworth's inspiration when he wrote the "Intimations of Immortality" can afford to take what liberties they will, and yet produce a creation perfect in beauty, a soul of poetry independent of its body, authentically alive and certain to endure. As in Ezekiel's valley of visions, the breath is the thing : the dry bones without it, however clothed, remain incapable of movement, deficient, dead. This is so, of course, in all poetry, but in the ode, perhaps, most of all. For this verse-form *presupposes* inspiration as the prime condition of its being : you may turn out a graceful toy of verse—a triolet or villanelle, say, or a polemical epigram—by dint of mere ingenuity ; but never an ode. How shall you address convincingly, passionately, poetically, things not

realised, visualised before you? How, till they have become real to you, shall they appear anything but artificial to your readers? And in the ode, if anywhere, the artificial is the intolerable.

The lyric ode retains its original "singable" character; the Pindaric, emphatically, does not. Even the Greek chorus of Pindar's own day might have been hard put to it to deal "antiphonally" and according to rule and precedent with the glorious ode of Wordsworth above mentioned; or with the "Setting Sun" ode cited as a more recent example. The strophe or longer stanza, the antistrophe or shorter one succeeding it, and the epode which is the culmination of both, need no longer keep their appointed places as strictly as when the singers of the ode moved from side to side of the stage, answering one another in antiphon. All that is now necessary to the ode's technical framework is the varying rhyme-scheme and length of line, each following the poetic impulse and the changing thought and feeling called up naturally by the various phases of the subject dealt with. This variability, next to the exaltation of mood and mind which apostrophises absent objects *naturally* as if they were present, is the ode's chief law. Different measures, different modes of versification, grow out of these separate phases of a single theme, and out of the emotions properly belonging to, spontaneously resulting from, the contemplation of each of those phases in turn. At the will of the wind the strings are swept to cadences stately or lively, *allegro* or *andante*; "short swallow-flights of song," or mountain-journeys on eagles' wings.

Shelley's "Ode to Naples," with its introductory epodes, has a classic flavour which will recommend it to students of the original Greek

form. But two of the purest examples of the Pindaric ode in English are Dryden's masterpiece, "Alexander's Feast," and Collins's "Ode to the Passions." Both are too well known to need quotation; so, at least in its finest parts, is Lowell's great ode to American University youths fallen in battle—a magnificent example. Not quite so well known to students in general, perhaps, is Coleridge's "Dejection." In any case, its seventh stanza may be quoted as a good illustration of how the irregular ode metre should be varied and adapted according to the ideas expressed; the verse changing with the vision:

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,  
Reality's dark dream!

I turn from you, and listen to the wind,  
Which long has raved unnoticed.  
What a scream

Of agony by torture lengthened out  
That lute sent forth! Thou wind, that rav'st without,

Bare crag, or mountain-tarn, or blasted tree,  
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,  
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,

Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,  
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,  
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,  
Mak'st Devil's yule, with worse than wintry song,  
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.

Thou actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!  
Thou mighty Poet, even to frenzy bold,

What tell'st thou now about?

'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,  
With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds—  
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!  
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!

And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,  
With groans, and tremulous shudderings—all is over—  
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!

A tale of less affright,  
And tempered with delight,  
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay :  
'Tis of a little child  
Upon a lonesome wild,  
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way ;  
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,  
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother  
hear.

Gray's Pindaric ode on "The Progress of Poesy," and his lyric ode "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," should be known to all students of this form as acclimatised in English verse. "The Bard" most people read along with the "Elegy" in early school-days; but the former should be re-read in this connection, as a masterpiece in ode metre. For pure beauty, in both forms, Wordsworth may be owned supreme; till a finer lyric example than the "Ode to Duty," a nobler Pindaric ode than the "Intimations of Immortality," can be produced by some later poet. Which seems, on the whole, unlikely.

## XX

### POETIC FORM—THE TOUCHSTONE OF BEAUTY

WHAT is it—the mystery of form in poetry? It is a thing distinct alike from style and substance; dependent on neither, and yet allied with both, for the form should grow out of the thought, the theme, and by its own shaping impulse create the style. It is the first essential, the prime condition, of poetic art; without which, indeed, not only poetry but mere verse would cease to be verse and become prose. For it is the mould into which thought must run before it can take the shape of song; the one thing differentiating it from prose-poetry, such as Ruskin's, which wears no such imprint. To change the metaphor, the poet's formless thought is the sculptor's block of granite or marble still unhewn; the form into which he chisels it is what makes of it the finished statue. Form is shape, line, order; creating a world out of chaos. It is the embodiment of law, and therefore of light. Contempt of form left even so great a thinker as Whitman "only a poet *manqué*," to quote the verdict of an able and distinguished critic of to-day. What it can do with minds less original and powerful the young poet will learn to his cost, should he swerve into that perilous bypath.



It is true that the modern heresy of the cult of ugliness may not, and does not, invariably afflict the irregular, the unshapely and unsymmetrical, in art. Matthew Arnold's noble poem on "The Future" is no less beautiful because it is written in irregular blank verse; it is "without form" (according to the strict laws of form) but certainly not "void." So with the finest works of Rabindranath Tagore, which are full of the fervid mysticism and brooding poetry of the East. But poetic thought, at its highest, *always* utters itself in music, always takes to itself beauty as a garment and wears that royal vesture right royally, whether draping it in classic folds or letting it float free as Nora Creina's gown, which "fluttered wild as mountain breezes." Matthew Arnold, a severe classicist in form and style habitually, knew the rules of his art so well that he knew also when they might be superseded by a higher law. Rabindranath Tagore has a mind, an imagination, so full of beauty that it overflows into his formless verse and gives it dignity, makes it poetry. But, other things being equal and rare exceptions being duly allowed, the Spirit of Poetry is infinitely more likely to take up her abode in a shapely than a shapeless dwelling. She loves to be invoked with appropriate, with ordered ritual: ordered by the rules laid down and followed by her great law-givers; hallowed by the practice of her chief votaries in all languages and through all ages. Once and again she may meet some elect spirit at a new, unsanctioned shrine, and crown with fire his offering; but, for the multitude, there is her own appointed temple, where she will be served with customary rite or not at all.

"But is not Art always breaking up the old,—



which tends to become the stereotyped,—to make room for the new?" the student may inquire at this point. "Browning was an innovator; the Pre-Raphaelites were innovators. Would not adherence to established form, to classic tradition, leave us with the 'dry-as-dust' later eighteenth-century writers, and apart from Wordsworth following a line of his own? And, if so, how are we to recognise the right when it happens to be the new?"

There is one sure test; one always; I think one only which is infallible. Is the new the beautiful? Does it charm, startle, surprise with the magic of spring, of youth, of morning? Does it show the delicate, minute truth to Nature of the Pre-Raphaelites, "with praises of the beauty of the truth"? Does it amaze with the magnificent vigour and flame with the splendour of Browning in his new cadences and colloquialisms? Has it a fresh gift of loveliness for the world? a fresh revelation of the Altogether Lovely, of whose works in Nature all art should be the illustration and interpretation? If so, you may accept it without hesitation; if otherwise, reject it. The right thing is the fair thing; not always in ethics, where the flowered way is often wrong; but invariably, infallibly in art.

In this matter of the uses and claims of poetic form, then, Beauty only can be our guide. She will leave us freedom; for freedom is one of the fairest things on earth, and art has always recognised her as such. But St James's phrase of "the perfect law of liberty"—law allowing liberty, liberty gladly maintaining law, till the two are fused in one—is an expression the artist understands no less than the Christian. What Sir William Watson says of himself, in writing of "Tradition in Art and

Letters," is nobly true of poets and artists as a race :

She guards, not binds ; coerces not, but shields,  
 And o'er this proud though little land of Me  
 Not an immediate governance she wields,  
 But a Protectorate and a Suzerainty.

Beneath her ambience fetterless I dwell,  
 Under the still monition of her eye ;  
 Not my custodian she but sentinel,  
 And less a bound or barrier than a sky.

Or, as Coventry Patmore puts it, referring to those who follow the guidance of beauty in a higher realm than even art's :

They live by law, not like the fool,  
 But like the bard, who freely sings  
 In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,  
 And finds in them not bonds, but wings.

Wings they will always be to those who own, and therefore understand, the wing-power. Those to whom the wings are burdens were never meant to fly ; except, indeed, when they are fledglings practising flight. Ease will come with use, in their case, for not every poet "lisps in numbers" ; some poets grow into their art as others are born into it. But to all (with the rare exceptions above noted) poetic form, poetic law and order, are indispensable. The soul must reveal itself by the body ; and the fairest body, other things being equal, is the best.

There are three theories of poetic art, each of which has a school, a cult and following, of its own. One holds that poetry should run wild like a weed ; and believers in this lean to Whitman's practice, or rather (for they too love beauty, and are con-

strained, therefore, to admit the frequent ugliness of the American writer) to Tagore's. Another theory maintains that poetry should be guarded, tended, cultivated like a hothouse plant : its disciples are classicists, traditionalists, pure and simple, like the French Parnassians. And the followers of the third, whose school is wide as the world, see in poetic art no flower, but a star ; free of as vast an orbit, truly, but subject to as strict a law. For verse-students, perhaps, these three theories may best be formulated in verse :

I.

The poet's art should be the bird's ; a crystal course  
Of lyric streams that well their way from one deep  
source.

Nor rhyme nor rule his music needs, nor ordered words.  
The poet's art, the poet's heart, should be the bird's !

II.

The poet's school should be the flower's, which Nature  
sows

But Art improves, as eglantine to royal rose.  
No wilding weeds his muse will tend, but guarded  
bowers :

The poet's school, the poet's rule, should be the  
flower's !

III.

The poet's way should be the star's ; so wide its sweep,  
So vast its scope, so strait the law it loves to keep.

In largest liberty confined with strictest bars,  
The poet's way (chief poets say) should be the star's !











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